

## Deganawida and Hiawatha

### An Iroquois Legend

[hiawatha and deganawida \(freedom-in-education.co.uk\)](http://freedom-in-education.co.uk)

The story of the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy is one of the most fascinating and wonderful that history has to offer us. It is the story of Deganawida and his disciple Hiawatha who single handedly brought about the unity of five warring tribes in America, many hundreds of years before Europeans settled the country.

The story has so many variations, it is hard to choose just one, but all accounts agree that amongst the five tribes that lived to the east of the great lakes, a terrible war raged, for many generations.

*The five tribes were the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Cayugas, the Senecas, and the Onondagas. Tribe fought with tribe, and in the tribes, villages fought with villages, and in the villages, families fought with families, and even in the families there was fighting. Fear and hatred reigned in the land and nobody was safe.*

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On the opposite shores of the great lakes, amongst the Huron nation, there lived a woman and her daughter. One night, as the woman slept, she dreamt that her daughter had a son called Deganawida, who would bring a message of peace and power from the Chief of the Great Sky Spirits to all the warring nations across the water. And sure enough the dream came about. A son was born to her daughter and they called him Deganawida. When he had grown to be a man, he told them of his desire to sail across the water and bring his message of peace and power to the five fighting tribes. His mother and grandmother consented, and Deganawida stepped into a canoe of white stone and rowed across the lake.

When the people saw him floating in a boat made of stone they were filled with wonder, and when they heard what he had to say they became willing to abandon their weapons and adopt his peaceful ways.

Deganawida didn't stay in any place for long; he travelled from one village to the next, always moving eastwards, telling the people his message of hope.

One day he reached the Mohawk tribe, whose chief was Hiawatha. Hiawatha was a fierce cannibal, renowned for being the best warrior in the land. But recently he had felt unable to fight and could not sleep at nights.

He was not surprised to see Deganawida and quickly called together his people to hear him speak.

"I come with good tidings from the Chief of the Sky Spirits," Deganawida said. "Fighting must cease in the land. The good Spirit never intended that blood should flow between human beings."

"But if we do not fight," one man objected, "we will be killed by the neighbouring tribes."

"The neighbouring tribes have already accepted my message of peace," said Deganawida, and Hiawatha's tribe then accepted his message as well.

When the time came for Deganawida to leave, he gave Hiawatha a parting piece of advice. "There is one I wish to warn you of," he said. "He is the Chief of the Onondagas who lives above the lake. He will not listen to my words, and has great powers to use against those who do." So saying, he left for the east.

Hiawatha had three daughters, and in the months ensuing Deganawida's departure they all died mysteriously.

Suspecting the evil man he had been warned of, and filled with grief, Hiawatha abandoned his tribe and home, and left to find Deganawida.

After a long and difficult journey he found him, and Deganawida's wise and kind words of consolation, succeeded in dispelling his grief. They spent many days together, at the end of which Hiawatha pledged to help Deganawida bring the tidings of peace to the five tribes.

They parted ways, and did not meet again until there was only one man left who had not accepted the message of peace and power: the evil Onondaga chief. They journeyed to his mountain together and found him in a cave above the lake. Hiawatha was shocked to see that he was more of a monster than a man, with a hideous face and serpents entwined in his hair!

They talked to him for a long time, and after many hours of discussion and persuasion, he began to smile. "I will accept your plan of peace," he said. His face lost all traces of ugliness and Hiawatha helped to comb the serpents out of his hair.

They returned down the mountain where all the tribes were gathered and began a great meeting. Deganawida proposed that they would form one nation and he told them the laws they should abide by, which became their constitution. They would be the Haudenosaunee nation (later known as the Iroquois Confederacy), and when the meeting was over, they buried all their weapons. Deganawida planted a tree above, and the tree became known as the Tree of Peace. Deganawida then left, leaving Hiawatha in his place.

The new nation prospered and was still strong when the Europeans came. Their constitution and democratic system of government was admired by the newcomers, particularly Benjamin Franklin, and this, along with its similarity, has given rise to the belief that the American constitution is based upon the constitution given to the Iroquois Confederacy by Deganawida and Hiawatha.

De-Ka-Nah-Wi-Da and Hiawatha  
An Iroquois Legend  
[De-Ka-Nah-Wi-Da and Hiawatha \(indigenousepeople.net\)](http://indigenousepeople.net)

The Hiawatha in this story is the historic person of the late fourteenth century. He should not be confused with the character in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, The Song of Hiawatha.

In the late nineteenth century, the Iroquois Six Nations Council asked their six hereditary Chiefs to write in English for the first time the traditional oral history of the formation of the League of Five nations. It was formed about 1390, 100 years before Columbus discovered America. (The Tuscaroras joined the League conditionally in 1715.)

The traditional history was dictated by the six ceremonial Chiefs, one from each of these tribes: the Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, Senecas, Onondagas, and the Tuscaroras. Two subchiefs were appointed secretaries, and the typewritten report was prepared by an Indian. On July 3, 1900, the completed history was approved by the Council of the Confederacy.

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About 1390, an Iroquois mother living near the Bay of Quinte had a very special dream: A messenger came to her and revealed that her maiden daughter, who lived at home, would soon give birth to a son. She would call him De-ka-nah-wi-da (De-kah-a-wee-da). When a grown man, he would bring to all people the good Tidings of Peace and Power from the Chief of the Sky Spirits.

De-ka-nah-wi-da was born, as the dream foretold. He grew rapidly. One day he said to his mother and grandmother, "The time has come for me to perform my duty in the world. I will now build my canoe."

When it was completed, and with the help of his mother and grandmother, he dragged the canoe to the edge of the water. The canoe was made of white stone. He got into it, waved good-bye, and paddled swiftly away to the East. A group of Seneca hunters on the far side of the bay saw the canoe coming toward them. De-ka-nah-wi-da stepped ashore and asked, "Why are you here?"

The first man replied, "We are hunting game for our living."

A second man said, "There is strife in our village."

"When you go back," De-ka-nah-wi-da told them, "you will find that peace prevails, because the good Tidings of Peace and Power have come to the people. You will find strife removed. Tell your Chief that De-ka-nah-wi-da has brought the good news. I am now going eastward."

The men on the lakeshore wondered, because the swift canoe was made of white stone. When they returned to their village and reported to their Chief, they found that peace prevailed.

After leaving his canoe on the east shore, De-ka-nah-wi-da travelled overland to another tribal settlement and asked the Chief, "Have you heard that Peace and Power have come to earth?"

"Yes, I have heard," answered the Chief. "I have been thinking about it so much that I have been unable to sleep."

De-ka-nah-wi-da then explained, "That which caused your wakefulness is now before you. Henceforth, you will be called Chief Hiawatha. You shall help me promote peace among all the tribes, so that the shedding of blood may cease among your people."

"Wait," said Hiawatha. "I will summon my people to hear you speak." All assembled quickly.

"I have brought the good tidings of Peace and Power from the Chief of the Sky Spirits to all people on earth. Bloodshed must cease in the land. The Good Spirit never intended that blood should flow between human beings."

Chief Hiawatha asked his tribe for their answer. One man asked, "What will happen to us if hostile tribes are on either side of us?"

"Those nations have already accepted the good news that I have brought them," replied De-ka-nah-wi-da. Hiawatha's tribe then also accepted the new plan of peace.

When the Messenger departed, Hiawatha walked with him for a short distance. "There is one I wish to warn you about because he may do evil to you," confided De-ka-nah-wi-da. "He is a wizard and lives high above Lake Onondaga. He causes storms to capsize boats and is a mischief-maker. I go on to the East."

Hiawatha had three daughters. The eldest became ill and died. Not long afterward, the second daughter died. All of the tribe gathered to console Hiawatha and to help him forget his great sorrow. One of the warriors suggested a game of lacrosse.

During the game, the last of Hiawatha's daughters went to the spring for water. Halfway there, she saw a beautiful high-flying bird of many bright colours. She called for the people to look at the bird. Then the huge creature swooped down toward her. In fear, she started to run back to her lodge. At the same time, the people came running to see the bird. Hiawatha's daughter was knocked down in the confusion. They did not see her and she was trampled to death.

"Has the wizard sent that bird and caused the death of my daughter?" wondered Hiawatha. Deeper in sorrow, he decided to leave his tribe and go away.

A few days later, he met De-ka-nah-wi-da, who commissioned him a Peacemaker. Henceforth, Hiawatha would spend his time going from village to village and spread the good Tidings of Peace and Power, so that the children of the future would live in peace.

The Mohawk Nation was the first to accept the peace plan, and they invited Hiawatha to make his home with them. One night De-ka-nah-wi-da appeared outside Hiawatha's sleeping room. "It is now urgent," he said softly, "that you come with me. We must go at once to another settlement. I have been there before and I promised to return."

On their way, they came to a large lake. De-ka-nah-wi-da asked Hiawatha to choose between paddling across the rough water and flying over it. Remembering the warning about the wizard, he chose to fly over the lake. De-ka-nah-wi-da used his supernatural power and turned both of them into high-flying birds.

When they reached the opposite shore, they resumed their natural bodies. Then they journeyed to the top of a very high hill to see the one chief, the great wizard, who had not yet accepted the good news of peace. Upon seeing him, Hiawatha was startled--the wizard's head was a mass of writhing snakes. His hands and feet were claw-like and twisted. He used his power to persecute others.

After a long time of discussion and gentle persuasion, Hiawatha noticed that the wizard began to smile! He exclaimed, "I do want to accept your plan of Peace and Power."

At once the wizard began to change. His hands and feet straightened. Hiawatha combed the snakes from his hair. Soon other chiefs arrived to help in the wizard's regeneration.

De-ka-nah-wi-da then asked all the chiefs and their chief warriors and assistants to meet on the shores of Lake Onondaga for a Council. Hiawatha, Chief of the Mohawks, asked the Oneida, Seneca, and Cayuga chiefs to bow their heads with him before the reformed wizard, who was the Onondaga Chief Atotarho (A-ta-tar'-ho). This was their way of showing their acceptance of him and their willingness to follow his leadership when called upon.

The Messenger stood before the Council and explained a plan for the Constitution of the Iroquois League of Peace: "Let us now give thanks to the Great Chief of the Sky Spirits, for our power is now complete. 'Yo-Hen, Yo-Hen,'" he said, meaning praise and thanksgiving.

The Great Spirit created man, the animals, earth, and all the growing things. I appoint you, Atotarho, Chief of the Onondagas, to be Fire-Keeper of your new Confederacy Council of the Five United Iroquois Nations.

"Chief Warrior and Chief Mother will now place upon your head the horns of a buck deer, a sign of your authority.

"Hiawatha shall be the Chief Spokesman for the Council. He will be the first to consider a subject and to give his opinion. He shall then ask the Senecas, Oneidas, and the Cayugas for their opinions, in that order. If not unanimous, Atotarho's opinion will be considered next. Hiawatha shall continue the debate until a unanimous decision is reached. If not accomplished within a reasonable time, the subject shall be dropped.

"Let us now make a great white Wampum of shell beads strung on deer sinews. Each bead will signify an event and create a design of memory. We shall place it on the ground before the Fire-Keeper. Beside it we shall lay a large White Wing. With it, he can wash away any dust or spot--symbolic of destroying any evil that might cause trouble.

"We shall give the Fire-Keeper a rod to remove any creeping thing that might appear to harm the White Wampum or your grandchildren. If he should ever need help, he shall call out in his thunderous voice for the other Nations of the Confederacy to come to his aid.

"Each Chief shall organize his own tribe in the same way for the peace, happiness, and contentment of all his people. Each Chief shall sit at the head of his own Council and matters shall be referred to him for final decision.

"In the future, your Annual Confederacy Council Fire shall be held here at the Onondaga village of Chief Atotarho. It will be your Seat of Government.

"Let us now plant a symbolic tree of long leaves destined to grow tall and strong. It will represent your unity and strength. When other nations wish to accept the good Tidings of Peace and Power, they shall be seated within the Confederacy Council. Atop the tall tree will proudly sit an all-seeing eagle to watch and warn you of any danger.

"Let each Chief now bring one arrow to form a bundle of arrows. Tie them together so tightly that they cannot be bent or broken apart. Place the bundle of arrows beside the Council Fire as another symbol of your unity and strength.

"Let us join hands firmly, binding ourselves together in a circle. If a tree should fall upon the circle, your circle cannot be broken. Your people can thus be assured of your unity and peace.

"If a Council Chief should ever want to remove himself as Chief, then his Horns of Authority shall be placed upon the head of his hereditary successor.

"You Chiefs must now decide what you will do with your war weapons," said De-ka-nah-wi-da.

Hiawatha then led the thoughtful discussion of the subject. The men agreed to dig a deep chasm where there was a rushing river beneath. Into this river the chiefs and their chief warriors threw all of their armaments of war. Then they closed the chasm forever.

De-ka-nah-wi-da reconvened the Council and stated: "I charge you never to disagree seriously among yourselves. If you do, you might cause the loss of any rights of your grandchildren, or reduce them to poverty and shame. Your skin must be seven hands thick to stand for what is right in your heart. Exercise great patience and goodwill toward each other in your deliberations. Never, never disgrace yourselves by becoming angry. Let the good Tidings of Peace and Power and righteousness be your guide in all your Council Fires. Cultivate good feelings of friendship, love, and honour for each other always.

"In the future, vacancies shall be filled from the same hereditary tribes and clans from which the first Chiefs were chosen. The Chief Mother will control the chiefship titles and appoint hereditary successors. New Chiefs shall be confirmed by the Confederacy Council before the Condolence Ceremony. At that time, the Horns of Authority shall be placed upon the head of the new Chief.

"All hunting grounds are to be in common. All tribes shall have co-equal rights within your common boundaries. I now proclaim the formation of the League of the Five Iroquois Nations completed. I leave in your hands these principles I have received from the Chief of the Sky Spirits. In the future you will have the power to add any necessary rules for the safety and well-being of the Confederacy.

"My mission is now fulfilled. May your Confederacy continue from generation to generation--as long as the sun will shine, the grass will grow, the water will run. I go to cover myself with bark. I will have no successor and no one shall be called by my name." De-ka-nah-wi-da departed from the Council Fire.

Chief Spokesman and Lawgiver Hiawatha arose before the Council and stated, "Hereafter, when opening and closing the Council Fire, the Fire-Keeper shall pick up the White Wampum strings and hold them high to honour all that has gone before. He will offer praise and thanksgiving to the Great Spirit. In Annual Council, the Chiefs will smoke the Pipe of Great Peace.

"If a chief stubbornly opposes matters of decision before the Council, displaying disrespect for his brother Chiefs, he shall be admonished by the Chief Mother to stop such behaviour and to act in harmony. If he continues to refuse, he shall be deposed.

"If a family or clan should become extinct, the Chief's title shall be given to another chosen family within his Nation, and the hereditary title will remain within that family."

All of the Chiefs of that first Council Fire agreed with Hiawatha's plan as a part of their new Constitution.

Chief Fire-Keeper Atotarho arose before the Council with his arms outstretched, holding the White Wampum strings high in praise and thanksgiving to the Holder of the Heavens. Herewith, he closed the historic first Confederacy Council Fire of the Iroquois League of Five Nations. "Yo-Hen, Yo-Hen!" he solemnly concluded, "thank you."

The Five Chiefs then smoked the Pipe of Great Peace!

## Hiawatha Tarenyawagon

An Iroquois Legend

[Article Archives: Hiawatha Tarenyawagon \(bigorin.org\)](http://bigorin.org)

The actual Iroquois legend of Hiawatha bears no relation to the stories contained in Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha. Longfellow's work portrayed Hiawatha as a hero of the Algonquins, and not the Iroquois. Longfellow's work was set in the Lake Superior region, while the actual Iroquois homeland of Hiawatha was in central and western New York State. The myths retold by Longfellow were actually stories of the Algonquin deity Michabo.

The myth of Hiawatha is a wonderful example of the "civic myth," documenting the founding of a nation. In this case, the nation is the Five Nation Confederacy of the Iroquois, whose system of government was studied by the American founding fathers in their formulation of the U.S. Constitution.

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Tarenyawagon, the upholder of the heavens, was awakened from his slumber by the horrible cries of anguish from earth. The humans were murdering each other, fighting against terrible giants, and falling into anarchy and deep despair. Taking the form of a mortal man, Tarenyawagon came to earth, taking a little girl by the hand, leading a miserable band of the human refugees to a cave where he told them to sleep, as hope had returned to humanity.

When the people had rested, Tarenyawagon again took a little girl by the hand and led the people toward the rising sun, where they built a great lodge house. There they lived happily. The former refugees prospered and had many children. Tarenyawagon called the people together and then told them to form five great nations and scatter. A few families were separated from the group; they were called Tehawroga, "those of different speech." From the moment that Tarenyawagon named them this, they began to speak a language different from the other people. To these "people of different speech," the Mohawk nation, Tarenyawagon gave tobacco, squash, corn, and beans, and also dogs to help them hunt. He taught them to be great farmers and hunters. Then he left, again taking a little girl by the hand.

Again, he separated some of the families and took them to a beautiful valley. He named them the Nehawretago, the "tall tree people," in honor of the fine forests in their new homeland. They also had their own separate language and became the Oneida nation.

Then, again taking a little girl by the hand, he led some families to a great mountain called Onondaga, which was the name of this new nation. They too began to speak their own language.

He separated more families, and taking another little girl by the hand, he took them to the lake called Goyoga, and the people became known as the Cayuga people.

There were now only a few families left, so Tarenyawagon took a little girl by the hand and led the families to another mountain called Canandaigua. This was to be the home of the people he named Tehonenoyent, the Seneca nation. Their name means "keepers of the door," as they are the sentinels of the five nations.

Now why did Tarenyawagon take a little girl by the hand as he founded these nations? The Iroquois people of the Five Nations are a matriarchal society, where the most respected leaders are the old women. These girls grew up to be the leaders of their nations. It is through the mother that one inherits among the people of the Five Nations.

Some of the people left the land of the Five Nations and went far to the west to the river called the Mississippi, from where they never returned. Separated by the great river, none of the Five Nations ever saw them again. But the Five Nations who remained in their homeland prospered.

Tarenyawagon gave each of the Five Nations its own particular gift. To the Onondaga was given the knowledge of the universal laws and the ability to understand the great Creator. To the Oneidas was given skill in making baskets and weapons. To the Mohawks was given great ability in hunting. Then Tarenyawagon went to live among the Onondaga people, where he took the name Hiawatha.

In the laws of the universe it is written that for every joy there must be a sorrow, for every darkness a light, and for every death a life. Even as the Five Nations lived in peace, the Wild People [the Algonquin tribes] came and attacked them from the northwest, out of the Great Lakes region. These people were not as civilized as the Five Nations and were a threat to all the people of Tarenyawagon.

So the Five Nations met together for a common defense. The people waited for three days for Hiawatha to come to lead them. On the fourth day he appeared in his magic birch canoe, accompanied by his daughter Mnihaha [the "Minihaha" of Longfellow], who was his child by an Onondaga wife. Hiawatha met with all the leaders of the Five Nations, greeted them as his brothers, and spoke each of their languages.

Out of heaven came a great noise like rushing water and thunder. Out of the clouds appeared the Great Mystery Bird of Heaven who then carried away Hiawatha's daughter. He laid his hand on her head in blessing before he commended her to the Great Mystery Bird. Hiawatha was so saddened by her departure that he sat in silent mourning and meditation, wrapped in a panther skin, for three days. Hiawatha never explained this mystery to the people, but many old people say that the girl was given to God in exchange for peace.

After the mourning period had ended, Hiawatha purified himself in a clear lake and called the leaders of the Five Nations together. He told them that the Five Nations were to be as one nation forever. Never again would they act separately. The downfall of one nation would be the downfall of all, as the victory of one nation would be the victory of all. He told the people to choose the wisest of their women to rule them.

The Onondagas were to be the warriors of the Iroquois. The Seneca were to speak on behalf of the Five Nations. The clever Cayuga were to be the guardians of the rivers, while the Mohawk would farm and hunt for all the tribes.

Then Hiawatha slipped into his magic birch canoe and rode into the sky.

**Birth of a Nation**  
An Onondaga Legend  
[History – Onondaga Nation](#)

Over a thousand years ago on the shores of Onondaga Lake, in present day central New York, democracy was born.

The Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca people had been warring against each other. There was great bloodshed and death surrounding us. These people of the five nations had forgotten their ways and their actions saddened the Creator. The Creator decided to send a messenger to the people so that the five nations could live in peace. The messenger is referred to as the Peacemaker.

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The Peacemaker was born on the northern shores of Lake Ontario. There he was raised by his mother and grandmother. Right away, they knew that this young person was special. He always talked of peace and that he was given a powerful message by the Creator.

When he was ready, the Peacemaker told his mother and grandmother that he was off to bring peace to the warring people. To travel there, the Peacemaker carved a canoe made entirely out of white stone! This amazing canoe would help convince the people of the powerful message of peace the Creator was sending to the five nations. He said his goodbyes, and then started his journey across the big lake in the stone white canoe.

In order for the Creator's message to spread, the Peacemaker sought out the most evil leaders of the people of the five nations. In searching for these people, the Peacemaker came upon a woman. This woman had no alliances but did provide shelter and food and promoted the continuation of the fighting between us. The Peacemaker told her about the message of peace and that her actions were promoting war and saddening the Creator.

After listening to the Peacemaker's message, she agreed to follow the message. She was the first to accept the great peace and change her ways. Because of this, the Peacemaker set aside a special duty for the women of the five nations. They will have the duty of Clan Mother. The Clan Mother will watch over the members of her clan and counsel them in a peaceful way. The Clan Mother will also have the important duty of selecting the next leader of their clan to keep the great peace continuing on.

The Peacemaker started with the eastern most nation, the Mohawks. In order for his plan to succeed, the Peacemaker sought after the most feared leaders. Peacemaker explained that he carried the Creator's plan of peace. That one nation can be easily broken, like a single arrow. But five arrows bound together with one heart, one mind, and one law will be powerful. The Mohawks liked his plan but were weary of a trap, so they tested the Peacemaker. Once the Peacemaker passed their test over a large waterfall, the Mohawks were the first Nation to accept the peace.

The Peacemaker continued traveling west, seeking out the most evil and dangerous men. As the Peacemaker told of the arrows, of all of the nations living symbolically in a large longhouse stretching across the land; the peace began to grow.

But one of the most feared men of the five nations was an Onondaga man named Tadodaho. Tadodaho was said to be so evil that his body was twisted and snakes grew from his head. Tadodaho defied all talks of peace. When one man, Hiawatha talked of peace and the end of war, Tadodaho killed his family. Grief stricken, Hiawatha no longer thought of peace until one day when he came upon a lake. As he came upon the lake, he found white and purple clam shells. When stringing these together, Hiawatha was able to have peace. He then joined with the Peacemaker and together they continued to spread the word of the peace to the other nations.

Once all four nations agreed to join in the peace, all that remained was the Onondaga. Peacemaker, Hiawatha, and the leaders from the other Nations were ready to confront Tadodaho again. Tadodaho tried his sorcerous ways to stop them as they traveled across Onondaga Lake. But the message of peace was unstoppable.

The Peacemaker then offered to Tadodaho a very special duty in this plan of peace. Tadodaho would preside over the Grand Council of 50 chiefs. That he would have the responsibility to make sure that decisions were made with a good mind and were aligned not only for today, but for the generations not yet born. It is at this time when Tadodaho agreed to live in a peaceful way as they “combed the snakes” from Tadodaho’s hair.

The Peacemaker then symbolized this union of peace by uprooting a great white pine tree. All 50 leaders and threw their weapons of hatred, jealousy, anger, and war into the hole and a mighty stream washed it away. As they replanted the tree, the Peacemaker placed an eagle on top of the Tree of Peace. The eagle is there to use his eyesight to look out far and to warn the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse, of any dangers on the horizon to this great peace.

A wampum belt was made to record the event. It is called the Hiawatha Belt. The belt is made of purple shells with five symbols across the center. Hiawatha Belt begins with a symbol for the Mohawk people, next the Oneida, in the center is the Tree of Peace and the Onondaga, next is the Cayuga and the final symbol is the Seneca people. We were now all united in peace and have remained that way for countless centuries.

Hiawatha the Unifier  
An Iroquois Legend  
[Hiawatha the Unifier - An Iroquois Legend. \(firstpeople.us\)](http://firstpeople.us)

Hiawatha (Haion-Hwa-Tha/He-Who-Makes-Rivers) is thought to have been a statesman, lawgiver, shaman, and unifier who lived around 1570.

According to some sources, he was born a Mohawk and sought refuge among the Onondaga when his own tribe at first rejected his teachings.

His efforts to unite the Iroquois tribes were opposed by a formidable chieftain, Wathatotarho, whom he eventually defeated and who killed Hiawatha's daughter in revenge..... But this is the legend.

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The slumber of Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon, Upholder of Heavens, was disturbed by a great cry of anguish and woe.

He looked down from his abode to earth and saw human beings moaning with terror, pursued by horrifying monsters and cruel, man-devouring giants.

Turning himself into a mortal, Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon swiftly descended to earth and, taking a small girl by the hand, told the frightened humans to follow him.

By trails known only to him, he led the group of shivering refugees to a cave at the mouth of a great river, where he fed them and told them to sleep.

After the people had somewhat recovered under his protection, Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon again took the little girl by the hand and led them toward the rising sun.

The band traveled for many days until they came to the confluence of two mighty rivers whose waters, white with spray, cascaded over tremendous rocks. There Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon halted and built a long-house for himself and his people.

For years they lived there, content and growing fat, their children turning into strong men and handsome women. Then Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon, the Sky Upholder became mortal, gathered the people around him and spoke: "You, my children, must now spread out and become great nations. I will make your numbers like the leaves of a forest in summertime, like pebbles on the shore of the great waters."

And again he took one little girl by the hand and walked toward the setting sun, all the people following him.

After a long journey they came to the banks of a beautiful river. Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon separated a few families from the rest and told them to build a long-house at that spot and found a village. "You shall be known by the name of Te-ha-wro-gah, Those-of-Divided-Speech," he told them, and they grew into the Mohawk tribe.

And from the moment he had named them, their language changed and they could no longer understand the rest of the people.

To the Mohawks Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon gave corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, together with dogs to help them hunt game. He taught them how to plant and reap and pound corn into

meal. He taught them the ways of the forest and the game, for in that long-ago time, people did not yet know all these things.

When he had fully instructed them and given them the necessities of life, Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon again took one little girl by the hand and traveled with the remaining people toward the sunset.

After a long journey they halted in a beautiful well-watered valley surrounded by forests, and he commanded another group to build their village at that spot. He gave them what was necessary for life, taught them what they needed to know, and named them Ne-ha-wre-ta-go, the Big-Tree people, for the great forests surrounding them.

And these people, who grew into the Oneida nation, also spoke a tongue of their own as soon as he had named them.

Then once more Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon took a little girl's hand and wandered on, always towards the setting sun, and the rest of the people followed him.

They came to a big mountain which he named O-nun-da-ga-o-no-ga. At its foot he commanded some more families to build a long-house, and he gave them the same gifts and taught them the same things that he had the others. He named them after the mountain towering above them and also gave them a speech of their own. And these people became the Onondaga nation.

And with a small girl at his side, Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon wandered on, leading the people to the shores of a lake sparkling in the sun. The lake was called Go-yo-gah, and here still another group built their village, and they became the Cayugas.

Now only a handful of people were left, and these Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon led to a lake by a mountain called Ga-nun-da-gwa. There he settled them, giving them the name Te-ho-ne-noy-hent – Keepers of the Door.

They too received a language of their own and grew into the mighty Seneca nation.

There were some among the people who were not satisfied with the places appointed to them by the Upholder of Heavens. These wandered on toward the setting sun until they came to a river greater than all others, a river known as the Mississippi.

They crossed it on a wild grapevine that formed a bridge from bank to bank, and after the last of them had crossed over, the vine tore asunder. None could ever return, so that this river divided the western from the eastern human beings.

To each nation the Upholder of Heavens gave a special gift.

To the Senecas he gave such swift feet that their hunters could outrun the deer.

To the Cayugas he gave the canoe and the skill to guide it through the most turbulent waters.

To the Onondagas he gave the knowledge of eternal laws and the gifts to fathom the wishes of the Great Creator.

To the Onedas he gave skills in making weapons and waging baskets.

To the Mohawks he gave bows and arrows and the ability to guide the shafts into the hearts of their game and their enemies.

Ta-ren-ya-wa-gon resolved to live among the people as a human being. Having the power to assume any shape, he chose to be a man and took the name of Hiawatha.

He chose to live among the Onondagas and took a beautiful young woman of that tribe for his wife. From their union came a daughter, Mni-haha, who surpassed even her mother in beauty and womanly skills.

Hiawatha never ceased to teach and advise, and above all he preached peace and harmony.

Under Hiawatha the Onondagas became the greatest of all tribes, but the other nations founded by the Great Upholder also increased and prospered. Traveling in a magic birch-bark canoe of dazzling whiteness, which floated above waters and meadows as if on an invisible bird's wings, Hiawatha went from nation to nation, counseling them and keeping man, animal, and nature in balance according to the eternal laws of the manitous. So all was well and the people lived happily.

But the law of the universe is also that happiness alternates with sorrow, life with death, prosperity with hardship, harmony with disharmony.

From out of the north beyond the Great Lakes came wild tribes, fierce, untutored nations who knew nothing of the eternal law; people who did not plant or weave baskets or fireclay into cooking vessels. All they knew was how to prey on those who planted and reaped the fruits of their labor.

Fierce and pitiless, these strangers ate their meat raw, tearing it apart with their teeth. Warfare and killing were their occupation.

They burst upon Hiawatha's people like a flood, spreading devastation wherever they went. Again the people turned to Hiawatha for help. He advised all the nations to assemble and wait his coming.

And so the five tribes came together at the place of the great council fire, by the shores of a large and tranquil lake where the wild men from the north had not yet penetrated.

The people waited for Hiawatha one day, two days, three days. On the fourth day his gleaming-white canoe appeared, floating, gliding above the mists. Hiawatha sat in the stern guiding the mystery canoe, while in the bow was his only child, his daughter.

The sachems, elders, and wise men of the tribes stood at the water's edge to greet the Great Upholder. Hiawatha and his daughter stepped ashore. He greeted all he met as brothers and spoke to each in his own language.

Suddenly there came an awesome noise, a noise like the rushing of a hundred rivers, like the beating of a thousand giant wings. Fearfully the people looked upward.

Out of the clouds, circling lower and lower, flew the great mystery bird of the heavens, a hundred times as big as the largest eagles, and when ever he beat his wings he made the sound of a thousand thunderclaps.

While the people cowered, Hiawatha and daughter stood unmoved. Then the Great Upholder laid his hands upon his daughter's head in blessing, after which she said calmly, "Farewell, my father."

She seated herself between the wings of the mystery bird, who spiraled upwards and upwards into the clouds and at last disappeared in to the great vault of the sky.

The people watched in awe, but Hiawatha, stunned with grief, sank to the ground and covered himself with the robe of a panther.

Three days he sat thus in silence, and none dared approach him. The people wondered whether he had given his only child to the manitous above as a sacrifice for the deliverance of

his people. But the Great Upholder would never tell them, would never speak of his daughter or of the mystery bird who had carried her away.

After having mourned for three days, Hiawatha rose on the morning of the fourth and purified himself in the cold, clear waters of the lake. Then he asked the great council to assemble.

When the Sachems, elders, and wise men had seated themselves in a circle around the sacred fire, Hiawatha came before them and said: "What is past is past; it is the present and the future which concern us. My children, listen well, for these are my last words to you. My time among you is drawing to an end.

My children, war, fear, and disunity have brought you from your villages to this sacred council fire. Facing a common danger, and fearing for the lives of your families, you have yet drifted apart, each tribe thinking and acting only for itself. Remember how I took you from one small band and nursed you up into many nations. You must reunite now and act as one. No tribe alone can withstand our savage enemies, who care nothing about the eternal law, who sweep upon us like the storms of winter, spreading death and destruction everywhere.

My children, listen well. Remember that you are brothers, that the downfall of one means the downfall of all. You must have one fire, one pipe, one war club."

Hiawatha motioned to the five tribal firekeepers to unite their fires with the big sacred council fire, and they did so. Then the Great Upholder sprinkled sacred tobacco upon the glowing embers so that its sweet fragrance enveloped the wise men sitting in the circle. He said: "Onondagas, you are a tribe of mighty warriors. Your strength is like that of a giant pine tree whose roots spread far and deep so that it can withstand any storm. Be you the protectors. You shall be the first nation.

Oneida, your men are famous for their wisdom. Be you the counselors of the tribes. You shall be the second nation.

Seneca, you are swift of foot and persuasive in speech. Your men are the greatest orators among the tribes. Be you the spokesmen. You shall be the third people. Cayuga, you are the most cunning. You are the most skilled in the building and managing of canoes. Be you the guardians of our rivers. You shall be the fourth nation.

Mohawk, you are foremost in planting corn and beans and in building long-houses. Be you the nourishers.

You tribes must be like the five fingers of a warrior's hand joined in gripping the war club. Unite as one, and then your enemies will recoil before you back into the northern wastes from whence they came. Let my words sink deep into your hearts and minds. Retire now to take counsel among yourselves, and come to me tomorrow to tell me whether you will follow my advice."

On the next morning the sachems and wise men of the five nations came to Hiawatha with the promise that they would from that day on be as one nation.

Hiawatha rejoiced. He gathered up the dazzling white feathers which the great mystery bird of the sky had dropped and gave the plumes to the leaders of the assembled tribes.

"By these feathers," he said, "you shall be known as the *Ako-no-shu-ne*, the Iroquois."

Thus with the help of Hiawatha, the Great Unifier, the mighty League of the Five Nations was born, and its tribes held sway undisturbed over all the land between the great river of the west and the great sea of the east.

The elders begged Hiawatha to become the chief sachem of the united tribes, but he told them: "This can never be, because I must leave you. Friends and brothers, choose the wisest women in your tribes to be the future clan mothers and peacemakers, let them turn any strife arising among you into friendship. Let your sachems be wise enough to go to such women for advice when there are disputes. Now I have finished speaking. Farewell."

**Note:**

The finishing part of this legend was lost and destroyed in an accident, but was only a sentence or two more, literally. However, it is said by many that Hiawatha died and was buried on the shores of that lake.