



Impact Statement

Jayden Mata, Grade 11

Peacemaker, 2026

Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on paper, 18 x 12 inches

Venture High School, Arlington, TX

Unsung Hero: Hiawatha

Hiawatha was born approximately 1525 AD, into the Onondaga tribe, which means "People on the Hills." Long before the European colonizers arrived, the southern Great Lakes was home to the Iroquois people. These lakes were divided into five warring tribes; the Onondaga, Mohawk, Cayuga, Oneida, and Seneca. Hiawatha lived near Lake Chamberlain and the Saint Lawrence River. Hiawatha was then adopted by the Mohawk tribe when he was young but then later returned to the Onondaga.

This experience helped shape his understandings of the two tribes, which were engaged in ongoing territorial war. Hiawatha then became a follower of a man named Deganawida, who was remembered as the Great Peacemaker. The only problem with having their message spoken out was Deganawida's speech impediment. Hiawatha believed that if the nations combined and made a truce, they could become a stronger nation and stronger against outside enemies. The courage and voice of Hiawatha was what Deganawida needed for his message to be spoken out, and so Hiawatha was then chosen to spread his message with his powerful story telling skills.

This voice of Hiawatha became the voice of the Peacemaker's vision. They then began to travel tribe to tribe to spread their story along with all the different nations of the Iroquois people. This was a very brave action for the tribes and centuries-old enemies to unify, which was not easy at all.

Most of the tribes rejected their message but whenever the Mohawk rejected their message, this was the turning point according to the legend. Hiawatha then had enough and went to prove his spiritual power. The Great Peacemaker then climbed up a tall tree near Cohoes Falls to show his intrepid beliefs. He asked the Mohawk chief to cut down the tree while he was on top, so he did so and the crowd watched as the tree fell which sent him to the running waters below.

With everyone believing he died, the Peacemaker then returned alive the next morning unharmed sitting at a campfire. This made the people of the tribes astonished by this miracle, and the Mohawk became the first tribe to agree on the peace union. Hiawatha and the Peacemaker then organized a council at the Onondaga Lake. Hiawatha then became the Chief of the Onondaga and gave out powerful speeches to the tribes to set their differences aside and unite and so the other nations then agreed.

Together, these nations created a Confederacy and planted a Tree of Peace on the Lakeshore to mark their union. Later in the early 1700s, the Tuscarora people, who also spoke the language of the Iroquois people joined the Confederacy, making them six nations strong. The tribes also created a constitution called, "The Great Laws of Peace," which had outlined many Democratic principles which also influenced the writers of the U.S Constitution.

Hiawatha's voice and legacy helped end centuries of bloodshed territorial wars between the tribes and still lives through on the Iroquois Confederacy and the Great Laws of Peace. Hiawatha and The Peacemaker's message showed that unity can be settled within the fiercest enemies to allies.