

Impact Statement

Alexandra Arndt, Grade 10

United, 2026

Oil painting on canvas, 12 x 24 inches

Independent Study, White Lake, MI

Unsung Hero: Jigonhsasee

Jigonhsasee is one of the first well-documented female political leaders in North America. She opened her home to those in need, offering food, water, shelter, and peace. I was drawn to Jigonhsasee due to her leadership and confidence. Especially as a woman. I admired her mother-like nature and that she allowed everyone the chance to speak with equal opportunity. I thought it would be great to bring to life a peaceful, lesser-known hero who shares important values that our world needs today.

Jigonhsasee was extremely influential in Native Americans' lives. She is credited for helping unite the Five Iroquois Nations through the formation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Her objective was to promote the ideas of Deganawida - the Great Peacemaker - who aspired to end all violence. Deganawida tasked Jigonhsasee with contacting the Five Nations' Clan Mothers. The Mothers were to gather an audience and the leaders for this meeting. By opening her personal home to members of all nations, Jigonhsasee provided them a space to negotiate peacefully, without resorting to violence.

However, the Onondaga Nation was unwilling to join the Confederacy. They were governed by Chief Tadadaho. Various legends state, "He was so evil his hair grew into snakes." Both Deganawida and Hiawatha beg the Chief to join the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, yet he resisted. Jigonhsasee suggested offering Tadadaho Chairman position, "Combing the snakes out of his hair." Her suggestion fully united the Five Iroquois tribes. Following this, the Great Law of Peace was carved into the sacred *wapum* (shell) belts. Without Jigonhsasee, there would not have been a safe place for the Nations to converse, or a mediator to settle tension.

Jigonhsasee's understanding built trust within the nations, ending a system of violence.

When designing my piece, I stressed simplicity to focus on Jigonhsasee. All five faces are different angles of Jigonhsasee. Jigonhsasee did not belong to a specific nation, rather a neutral nation, representing the united goal. The placement of each head is symmetrical to the one on the opposite side. Their facial expressions are slightly different, distinguishing the individual tribes' traditions, practices, and feelings; while collectively belonging to the Iroquois Nation. The outer faces have greater contrast emphasizing the darkness surrounding the combative nations, along with more irritated expressions. As the faces draw closer to the center, they are increasingly calmer, indicating that within unity there is peace. The 5 Nations are also differentiated through their headbands. Each Iroquois Nation has their own number of eagle feathers and specific placement signifying their tribe to other nations. The Onida Tribe is three

feathers with one bent; Mohawk is three feathers up; Ondangwa is two feathers with one bent; Cayuga is one bent feather; and Seneca is one feather up. Traditionally these feathers are worn on men's caps, however, women wore headbands. I decided to place the feathers on beaded headbands and crowns with colors significant to each tribe, showing Jigonhsasee's appreciation for all tribes was just as honorable as the feathers.

The chaotic movement of the hair illustrates that the nations are connected even through chaos. To execute this effect, I used a dry brush with some paint to make fine hair and direction. This technique was also used in the feathers. This provides the viewer with some action and movement within the piece. I wanted the colors to be very rich, contrasting the darkness surrounding the faces, which is why I used oil paint on canvas. The highlights on the skin and hair carry a yellow glowing undertone. My goal was to create the reflection of candlelight, reminding the viewer of the timeframe and the pure light that Jigonhsasee brought to the Five Iroquois Nations. The necklaces and their positioning is intentional. I decided to create five necklaces, each being a color from a tribe's headband. The central head shows five total necklaces; all tribes are connected when united. As they branch off on each side, from the center, there are less necklaces, showing the breakage of the tribes. The necklaces begin to move chaotically and stretch to the point of almost breaking, which emphasizes tension. The purple necklace is DNA, symbolic of Jigonhsasee being the "Mother of all Nations." The direction of the lines on the DNA is consistent until the outside faces. The lines then grow messier, moving in opposite directions. There is another necklace with the wampum beads, referencing their importance in the Five Nations' culture. Their purple color is also why the central head crown is purple.

My painting illustrates the peace found within chaos, and how our voice can be that change. I hope the intentionality of my piece causes others to reflect on the usage of their own voice. Do I promote positive or negative situations? How do I influence others? And ultimately consider how they can direct their voice to act and benefit others in their community. I wanted my art to show the process in achieving a connected community and the beauty found within that. Jigonhsasee story will continue to influence my life in many ways. She taught me to value the collective groups' needs before my own. Jigonhsasee reminded me of the importance of maintaining an active role in my community, allowing small change to bloom into something larger. She has also encouraged me to open my doors to people around me, through volunteering and acts of service, including actively listening and understanding an individual's story. I recently finished my project and plan on posting a photo of my finished work on social media with my artist statement to share Jigonhsasee story and her heroic work. I also intend to share it with my community and classmates. Jigonhsasee story has shown me the value of peacefully acting against violence for the betterment of the world, not notoriety.

References:

<https://thecharlottegazette.com/2022/09/01/judy-moore-jigonhsasee-the-mother-of-nations/>