Councils and Clans

Compare leadership and family ties in two Indigenous regions

SS24.6.1a "Compare the political and social structures of Southeastern Woodland Indigenous peoples and those of another region of North America."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about how each society made decisions, circle details about clans, and number one similarity and one difference you find. Use your marks to compare the two societies.

Who Decided, and Who Belonged?

1. In the 1600s, Cherokee people lived in many towns across the Southeast. A town had its own council, where leaders discussed choices such as trade, war, and peace. Towns could work together, but no single chief ruled every Cherokee town. Cherokee people belonged to clans traced through their mothers. A child belonged to the mother's clan, which connected that child to relatives beyond the household. Women grew crops and held important knowledge and authority in community life. These patterns shaped both how towns made decisions and how people understood family ties.

2. Farther north, the Haudenosaunee lived in the Northeast. In the 1600s, their confederacy joined five nations: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. Each nation had its own councils, and leaders also met in a shared council to discuss matters affecting them all. Clan mothers chose the men who served as chiefs on that council and could remove them. Like the Cherokee, Haudenosaunee people traced clan membership through mothers. Families in the same clan treated one another as relatives, even across different villages.

3. Imagine a visitor asking who could speak for everyone when another group proposed an agreement. In a Cherokee town, the visitor might hear a decision from local leaders but would need to speak with other towns, too. Among the Haudenosaunee, leaders from different nations could discuss a shared response through their confederacy council. Neither society placed all power in one person's hands. Both also linked family and public life through mothers' clans, though Haudenosaunee clan mothers had a stated role in choosing confederacy chiefs. These differences matter when comparing how groups cooperated.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Cherokee towns and Haudenosaunee nations differ in making decisions that affected several communities?

2. What was similar about clan membership and family ties in the two societies?

3. Why would asking one leader to settle an agreement for every community not fit either society?

4. Compare women's roles described in the passage. What role did Haudenosaunee clan mothers have in choosing leaders?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are planning visits to discuss a trade agreement that affects several communities. In 5 or 6 sentences, explain whom you would consult in each society, how you would respect clan ties in both places, and why your plans would differ.

ANSWER KEY

Councils and Clans

GRADE 6 · SS24.6.1a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about how each society made decisions, circle details about clans, and number one similarity and one difference you find. Use your marks to compare the two societies. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Cherokee towns and Haudenosaunee nations differ in making decisions that affected several communities?	**Cherokee towns had their own councils and could work together, but no chief ruled all the towns. Haudenosaunee nations had their own councils and a shared confederacy council.**
2	What was similar about clan membership and family ties in the two societies?	**Both traced clan membership through mothers, and clans connected people to relatives beyond their households.**
3	Why would asking one leader to settle an agreement for every community not fit either society?	**No single chief ruled all Cherokee towns. Haudenosaunee leaders from different nations discussed shared matters in a council rather than leaving them to one leader.**
4	Compare women's roles described in the passage. What role did Haudenosaunee clan mothers have in choosing leaders?	**Cherokee women grew crops and held knowledge and authority in community life. Haudenosaunee clan mothers chose confederacy chiefs and could remove them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would visit several Cherokee towns because one town's council could not decide for all of them. I would ask each council how its town viewed the trade agreement. For the Haudenosaunee, I would ask how leaders from the five nations could discuss the agreement in their shared council. I would remember that people in both societies belonged to their mothers' clans. I would respect those family connections when speaking with people in either place. My plans differ because Cherokee towns made their own decisions, while Haudenosaunee nations also had a shared council.

Accept responses that distinguish Cherokee town councils from the Haudenosaunee shared council without claiming that either society had one ruler. Students should identify maternal clan ties in both societies and avoid assuming that women held identical leadership roles.