

hall of eastern woodlands indians



AHKWESÁHSNE FREEDOM SCHOOL

The Ahkwasáhsne Freedom School (Pre-K to 8) was founded in 1980 by Mohawk community members. The school is on Mohawk, or *Kaniekeha*, territorial lands in upstate New York and Canada. As well as the usual academic subjects, young people learn about their history, language, and culture in a hands-on learning environment. Everyone in the community belongs to a clan. All children share the same clan as their mother. Fathers belong to a different clan.

The school curriculum includes participation in Mohawk religious and cultural ceremonies, such as Mid-Winter and Harvest. Activities range from conducting an extensive study of the local wetland plants—particularly medicinal plants—to performing plays and cheerleading in the Mohawk language.

The Pre-K class soon becomes fluent in Mohawk, the only language used in the school until the end of the sixth grade.



In the seventh and eighth grades, teachers and students switch over to English in preparation for high school.

The school building is a longhouse. The central corridor is lined with two long, parallel lines of purple and white tiles, like wampum. It's here that the whole school meets at the beginning and end of each day to join in the Thanksgiving Address, *Ohenton Kariwatekwa*, or "Words Before All Else." Students acknowledge and give thanks to the Creator, all those on Earth, and those up in the sky world.

Learn more about the Ahkwasáhsne Freedom School at the school site: www.potsdam.edu/EDUC/Akwesasn/AFS.html

Read about the history of the Ahkwasáhsne community: www.wampumchronicles.com/history.html

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving, established as a U.S. holiday in 1863, is widely believed to commemorate an alleged invitation to share a meal offered to the Wompanoag—an Algonquin-speaking people—by the newly arrived Pilgrims. However, the true history of the holiday is more complex.

The arrival of Europeans in what is now Massachusetts exposed the Wompanoag to diseases previously unknown to the community. One epidemic killed all the inhabitants of a Wompanoag town called Patuxet. In 1620, English Pilgrims settled in this emptied town and renamed it New Plymouth. That year their Wompanoag neighbors taught the Pilgrims about local plants, with so much success that the Pilgrims had enough food to see them through their first winter. The English celebrated this harvest in the autumn of 1621 with a week of games and feasting. The *sachem*, or leader, of

Pokanoket village visited during the celebration along with 90 other Wompanoag. Although the reasons for this visit are unknown, a letter records that the Wompanoag visitors shared in three days of the celebration.

Like many Native American communities, the Wompanoag give thanks to the Creator every day for everything on Earth, as well as in the sky and beyond. By contrast, English colonists came from a tradition where harvest is celebrated in fall with a large, bountiful meal. Before 1863, Thanksgiving was a day when European settlers celebrated military victories over Native American nations.

Find out more at www.plimoth.org



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Okeokwin ("Leader of the crowd")
Grade: 6
Clan: Turtle
Likes: gym, geography, history, kickball, and hockey
Wants to be: a pediatrician
Admires: her big sister, her dad, and her uncle, who helped build the World Trade Center



Niiohonta ("Small grass")
Grade: 5
Clan: Bear
Likes: to learn new things—"it makes you think"—math, and kickball
Wants to be: the first Native American girl in space



Kanonkwaterakohe
("She who gathers medicine")
Grade: 5
Clan: Bear
Likes: math
Wants to be: a teacher

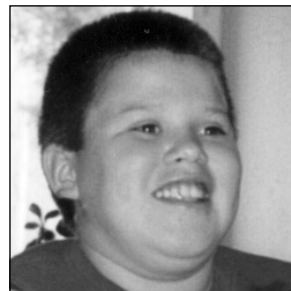
Meet some Ahkwesáhsne fifth and sixth graders:



Tsionatiio ("Nice little town")
Grade: 5
Clan: Bear
Likes: math and soccer
Wants to be: a policewoman
Admires: her older brother—they construct remote cars from scratch—and her grandparents
Asks NYC kids: Where do you live and how does it feel to live there? Did you know that our lands are in the U.S. and Canada? We have no boundaries.



Tontawentaren ("New dawn")
Grade: 5
Clan: Deer
Likes: math, kickball and reading—one of her favorite books is "The Grasshopper"—and to learn new things
Wants to be: a veterinarian
Admires: her elders
Asks NYC kids: Did you know that we speak Mohawk?



Tehrenhniserakhas
("He puts two days into one")
Grade: 6
Clan: Bear
Likes: math, kickball, and R&B songs
Wants to be: an ironworker
Admires: his mom and dad
Asks NYC kids: How does it feel to grow up and live in New York?



Tsiehente ("She leads")
Grade: 6
Clan: Bear
Likes: kickball
Admires: her aunt and her little sister



Kahentawaks
("She sways with the grass")
Grade: 5
Clan: Deer
Likes: math and kickball
Wants to be: an actress
Admires: her auntie



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