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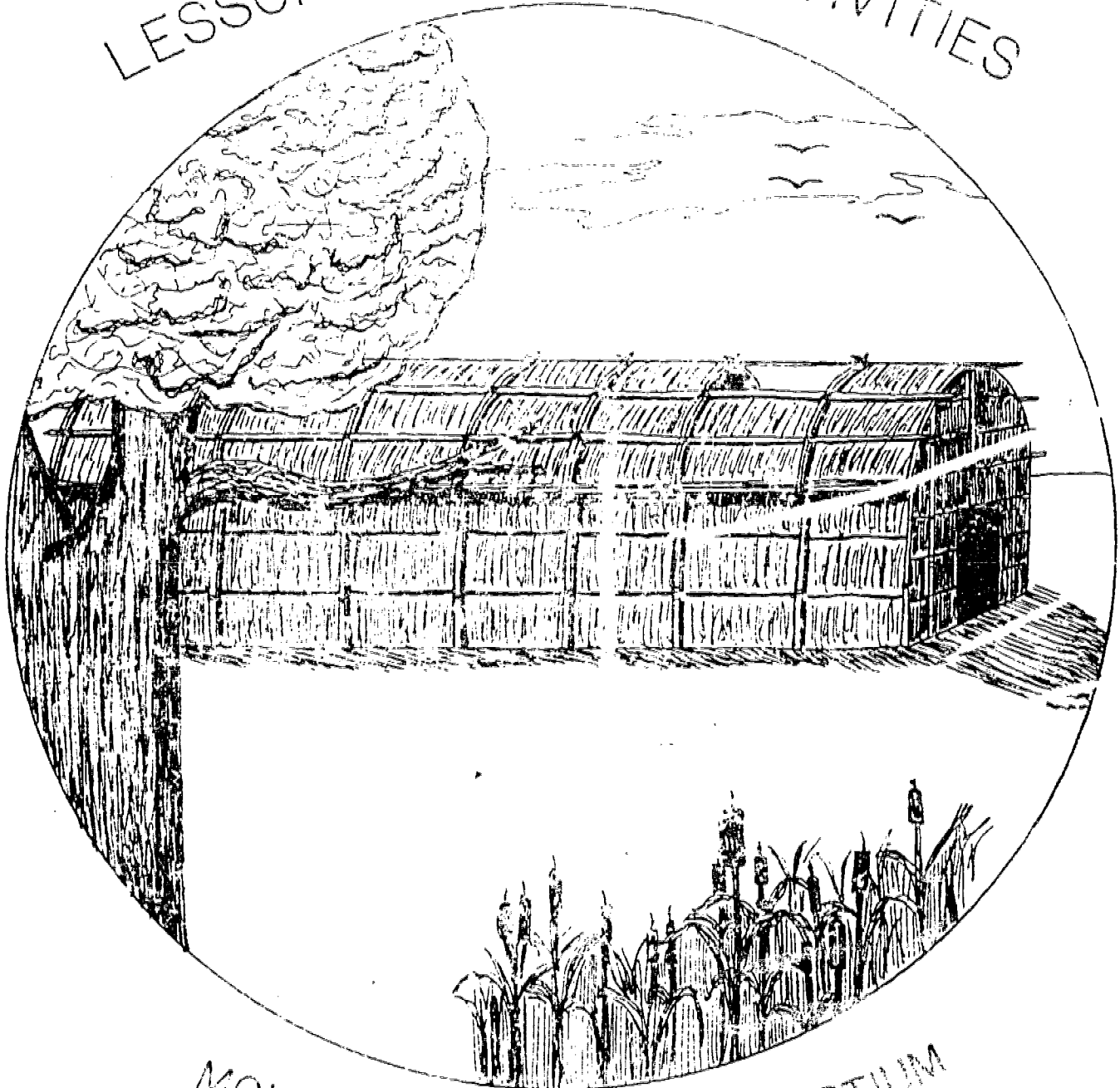
ABSTRACT

This is a unit on Iroquois culture of the past and the aspects of that culture which continue to exist in the longhouse tradition at the present time. The unit is divided into four sections: (1) an introduction that provides a summary of background information on the Iroquois village and mode of living; (2) an outline of the concept, objectives, and materials; (3) a detailed outline of procedures for a lesson on the construction of a longhouse; and (4) a lesson plan on life inside the longhouse. The booklet contains appropriate illustrations and an activity sheet at the end. (AMH)

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# THE LONGHOUSE LESSON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES



MOHAWK LANGUAGE CONSORTIUM

TITLE VII

BI-LINGUAL EDUCATION

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THE LONGHOUSE

Adapted from the Cultural Education Guide

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## THE LONGHOUSE

All of the material within this booklet is descriptive of the Iroquois culture of the past however various aspects of the culture continue to exist in the longhouse tradition at the present time.

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## THE VILLAGE

They resided in villages located in the vicinity of rivers, lakes and streams. They were usually built upon elevated land as a protective measure against enemies. These villages were occupied for a period of one to five years depending on the fertility of the land and the abundance of game. Each village was surrounded by a palisade wall or palisade of logs which often has a deep trench dug around the outside to insure protection.

Villages differed in that some contained only a few houses while others had as many as a hundred. Nevertheless, the basic pattern was always identical in that the village stood in the heart of the clearing surrounded by the cultivated fields. For the majority, a cluster of large houses referred to as longhouses, served as living quarters and were spaced uniformly over an open area.

Longhouses were elongated dwellings subdivided to accommodate a number of families of the same clan. The frame of the longhouse was constructed of logs set upright into the ground, fastened by crosspoles and shingled with elm bark. At the ends of the house were doors, either of bark with hinges of wood, or of deer or bear skins suspended from the opening. Over one of these doors, the clan symbol of the residing families was carved. There were no windows in the longhouse.

Each section contained a central fire which accommodated two families, one on either side. On both sides, wide seats made of bark were arranged and extended about two feet from the ground along the length of the long-

house. Mats and skins were spread on these shelves which were employed as seats during the day and beds at night. A similar shelf was constructed approximately five feet above the lower ones to provide storage space for family possessions. The winter supply of corn was hung on cross-poles near the roof and dried corn and beans were stored within bark barrels in the small vestibules at either end of the house.

Surplus corn, beans and other staples were stored in a root cellar within the village. The bottom and sides were covered with bark and a water-tight bark roof was constructed to cover the surplus food after it was deposited.

The Iroquois were extremely conscious of personal cleanliness habits. The care, health and respect of one's own body is an integral part of Iroquois culture. Each village usually contained a dome-shaped lodge, which was employed for steam bathing. The interior was filled with steam created by pouring water over heated stones. The lodge played an important role in the process of physical and spiritual purification. The collecting of refuse in a pit outside of the village was practiced as a sanitary measure.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Rosenblat et. al.; The Iroquois People.

(Buffalo, N.Y.: Buffalo Public Schools, 1973), p.9..

## UNIT I HOME AND FAMILY

CONCEPT: Iroquois of long ago lived in homes called longhouses.

### OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. relate how people long ago lived in longhouses;
2. list the clans for each longhouse;
3. list the steps in constructing the longhouse;
4. list the reasons for and against families living together;
5. write and pronounce the Mohawk word for longhouse.

### MATERIALS:

Replica of a longhouse, Instructor teaching picture # 780 "Building a Longhouse", Ditto sheet with model of longhouse, activity sheet



"CONSTRUCTION OF A LONGHOUSE"

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## NARRATIVE

### THE VILLAGE:

#### The Longhouse Layout

Size: 5 - 20 families  
15' - 20' wide  
30' - 200' long  
15' - 25' at peak of roof  
12 - 100 longhouses  
60' x 20' average size

#### MATERIALS FOR BUILDING LONGHOUSE:

stone axes, stone headed clubs for cutting trees,  
bone awl.

A solid ring of clay was made around the trunk of a tree, just a few feet above ground. Dry branches were leaned against the tree below the clay ring and set on fire. As the branches burned, the men added more fuel until the bottom of the tree became quite charred. They chopped away this charred part with their stone tools. They continued this process for hours until at last the tree came crashing down. The ring of clay at the bottom prevented the fire from extending above it.

The men and boys worked for days until they had the trees felled, limbed and the bark peeled off. The bark slabs were four feet wide and from 6' to 8' long.

After the bark slabs were removed they were stacked on top of each other and weighted down with rocks to keep them from warping. Next, the men marked the out-

line of the actual floor space of the building and dug holes along it. The poles were set up right in the hole with forked limbs on top. Using the inner bark from basswood or hickory as a lashing material, they fastened horizontal poles around the frame work of uprights. Because they weighed less, the young boys climbed up and placed other poles in the fork of the uprights, so they extended across from wall to wall, and lashed them down firmly. These poles served as rafters. The roof was peaked yet it had no ridge poles. The men slanted the roof supports toward each other in pairs, so that the slender ends crossed at the top. They bent the ends a little and lashed them together, forming a slight curve.

When the large slabs of bark were dry, the women placed them in a line on the ground so that each one overlapped the next. With a sharp bone awl, they punched holes through the tops and strung the slabs together with basswood cordage. They added slab after slab until they had a long runner of bark. Starting at the bottom of the house and working lengthwise, the men lashed the runners to the outside of the frame. Each layer slightly overlapped the one below it.

To hold the bark more securely, the men lashed more poles to the outside. For this task they had to work in pairs, with one man inside the building and one on the outside. First they set the outer pole against the original inside pole. Two holes were punched through the bark wall, one on each side of the poles. The man on the

outside passed each end of a basswood cord through the one pair of holes. The man on the inside pulled the ends up and knotted them firmly. Since all of the men and boys worked on the frame work, it was not long before the job was completed.<sup>2</sup>

10's entered a

<sup>2</sup>Hofsinde, Robert. Indians at Home. (N.Y.: Wm. Morrow and Co., 1964).

## LESSON I

TOPIC: Construction of the Longhouse (Kanonses)

GRADE LEVEL: 4- 6

TIME: 30 minutes

PURPOSE: To describe Longhouse construction

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. name the materials used in the construction of the longhouse
2. list three steps taken in constructing the longhouse
3. name the types of tools used in the construction of the longhouse
4. pronounce Mohawk name for longhouse

MATERIAL:

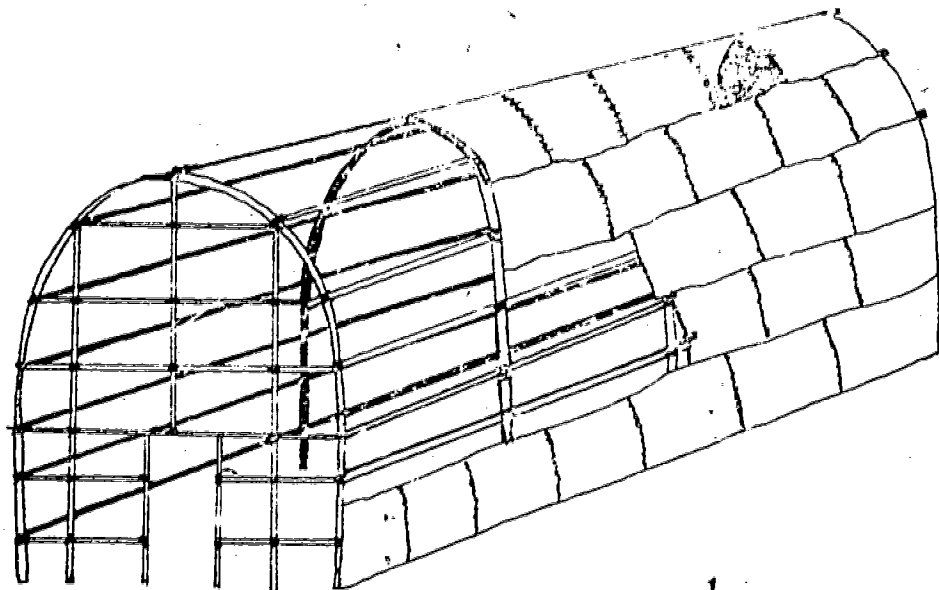
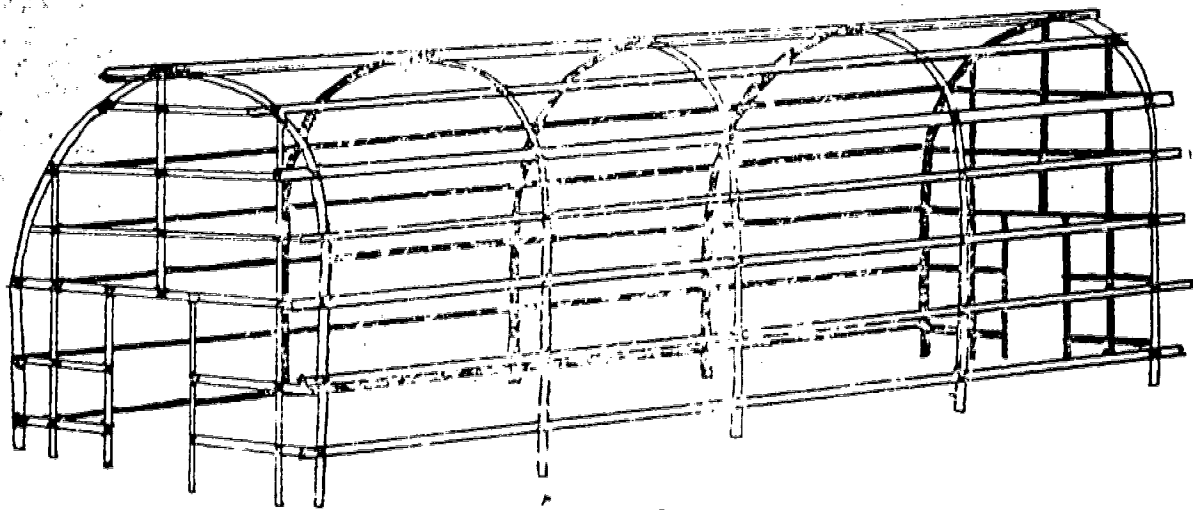
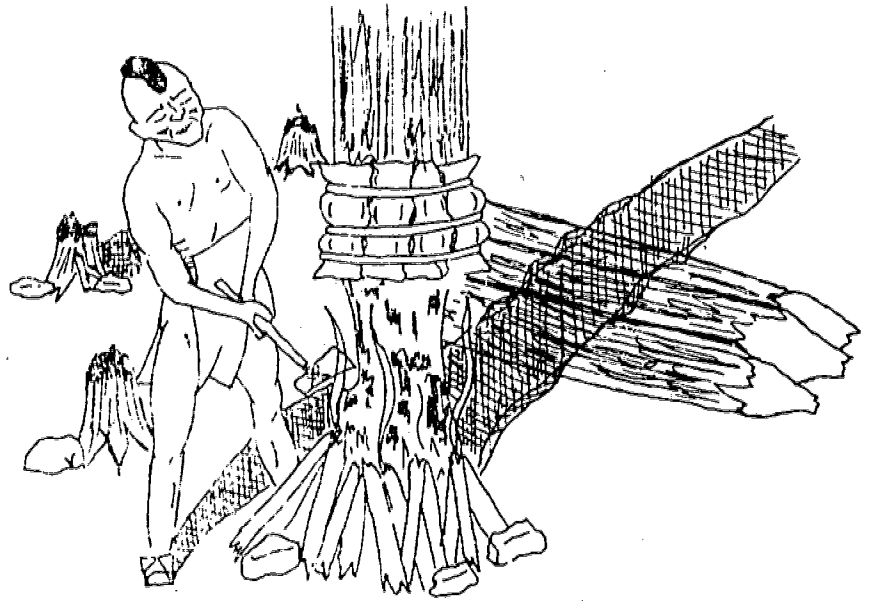
Replica of longhouse (if available). Illustration of longhouse and the narrative.

METHOD:

Describe, to the students, the size of the longhouse of long ago. List the tools that were needed for constructing the longhouse. Describe the methods used for construction; listing the steps and materials in sequential order. Say the name for Longhouse in Mohawk and ask the students to pronounce it. Allow time for answering questions.

EVALUATION: Given an activity sheet, students will complete seven out of ten questions correctly.

# CONSTRUCTION OF A LONGHOUSE





LIFE INSIDE THE LONGHOUSE



## LIFE INSIDE THE LONGHOUSE

The longhouse was entered from either end of the structure through a roomy vestibule that was as wide as the house and about 12' deep. These two end rooms were used for storage and as a place for visiting.

When summer came these rooms were converted into roomy porches by removing the bark slabs from the sides. In the winter the outer doorway was closed with a deer hide or a bark slab door hung on wooden hinges.

The people built fires, which were needed for both cooking and for light, in the center of the longhouse. Some of these longhouses had as many as twelve of these fireplaces. There were no windows but a good deal of light came through the smoke holes in the roof. During snow or rainy weather the Indians covered the smoke holes with additional bark slabs which were pushed into place from the inside with the aid of long poles. At such times the interior of the longhouse became quite smokey, and about the only way the people could escape the discomfort was to retire to their sleeping quarters.

The sleeping shelves were built about 18" from the floor against the two long walls. Each family had a space eight to twelve feet long and from five to six feet wide. Both ends were walled off with bark slabs for privacy. Sweet grass, which gives off a pleasing fragrance when damp, was hung on the partitions both as a decoration and as a perfume.

Another shelf was built above the sleeping shelf that was supported by poles that rested on the partitions. Personal belongings such as bark boxes, pottery, snowshoes, and hunting gear were stored on these shelves. The front pole that held the shelf up also served as a rod for curtains of tanned deer hides, which covered the front opening of the sleeping platform. The space below the sleeping platform held the family cooking pots, carved spoons, and water barrels.

The rafters of the longhouse were hung with corn, the husks braided together and with strings of dried apples, pumpkin, squash and other fruits of the field.

Dried meat and fish were stored in the two end vestibules and the spaces between some of the sleeping platforms. For such storage the men made large bark barrels lined with untanned deer hides, which kept the food fresh.

Corn husks were used as kindling and as a stuffing for pillows and mattresses. Dried corncobs served as fuel or scrubbing bushes for cleaning clay pots and wooden dishes and sometimes as back scratchers.

Two families usually shared the same fire and their companionship was a pleasant one. Here at the end of the day the men sat down to smoke and talk. The men made or repaired their weapons and the things they needed on the game trail. While the men worked on their crafts, the women worked on tasks such as replacing broken pottery bowls. An Iroquois woman made a bowl in such a way as to be able to stand the fire when cooking or hang it up

When she was not using it.

Although the Iroquois spent many hours outdoors, life within the longhouse was centered around the warmth and companionship of the family quarters and the fire. The elders spent many hours telling the children tales and legends around the fire on cold winter evenings.

Today the longhouse is used for religious and political purposes. One of the symbols used for the Five Nations Confederacy is a picture of a great longhouse with 5 smoke holes in it, that extends across the State of N.Y. This symbolized 5 separate nations living the same way of life. The Mohawks as the Keepers of the Eastern door, the Oneidas as a younger brother. The Onondagas as the Keepers of the Grand Council Fire, the Cayuga as a younger brother and the Senecas as the Western Doorkeepers.

The Iroquois Confederacy consisted of five nations of which were previously mentioned. Later a Sixth nation was adopted in the year 1712, this was the Tuscarora nation, making the confederacy later known as the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy.

TOPIC: Life Inside the Longhouse

GRADE: 4-6

TIME: 20-30 minutes

VOCABULARY: kanonses - longhouse

PURPOSE: To teach the students about life inside the longhouse.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. state the reasons for the families living together
2. describe the inside of the longhouse
3. compare living in the longhouse long ago with living in today's home

MATERIALS:

Longhouse replica, picture depicting life within the longhouse

METHOD:

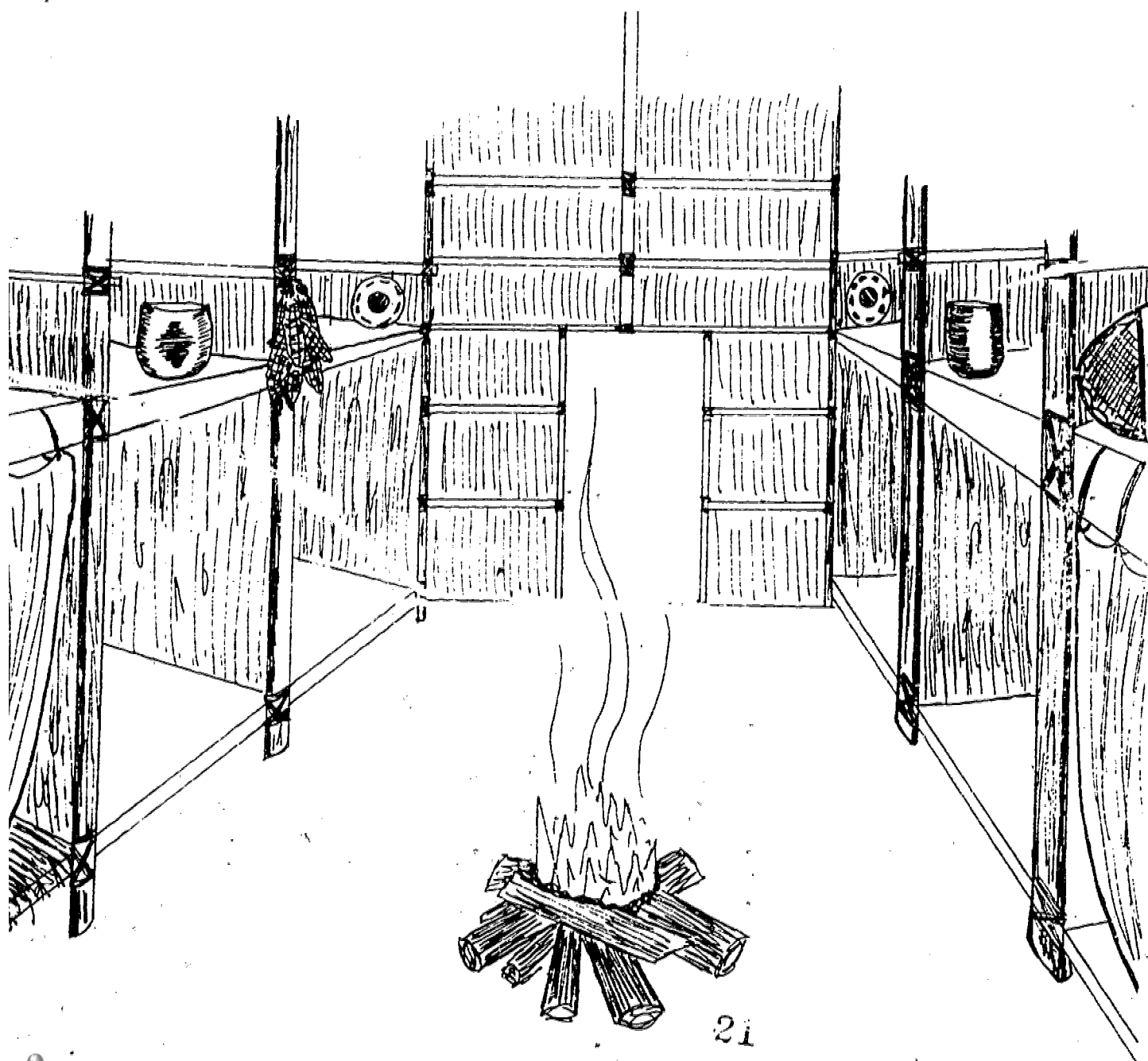
Show the students the replica of a longhouse ( or use a picture with the inside view). Point out the living and sleeping areas, where the food was kept and the sharing of the fires.

Ask the students to name reasons for more than one family living together. Why would it be good? What would not be good about it?

Discuss how living long ago in the longhouse is different than living in your home today. Provide the students with an evaluation sheet.

EVALUATION: Worksheet. The students will be able to answer the 7 out of 10 questions, correctly.

# INSIDE THE LONGHOUSE



## ACTIVITY SHEET

### LIFE IN THE LONGHOUSE

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions below by drawing a circle around the T or F (T-true F-false).

1. Long ago Indian people lived together to help one another. T or F
2. The beds were built along one wall of the longhouse. T or F
3. Two families shared the fire area. T or F
4. People of the same clan did not live together in one longhouse. T or F
5. Living in today's home is the same as living in longhouse of long ago, T or F
6. The women dried corn by hanging the stock from the ceiling. T or F
7. The people of the longhouse shared the work to be done. T or F
8. More than one clan lived in a longhouse. T or F
9. The fire areas were built only at the ends of the longhouse. T or F
10. The longhouse was entered through one door, T or F

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Hofsinde, Robert. Indians at Home. N.Y., N.Y.: Wm. Morrow and Co., 1964.

Rosenblat, Marilyn et al. The Iroquois People. Buffalo, N.Y.: Buffalo Public Schools, 1973.