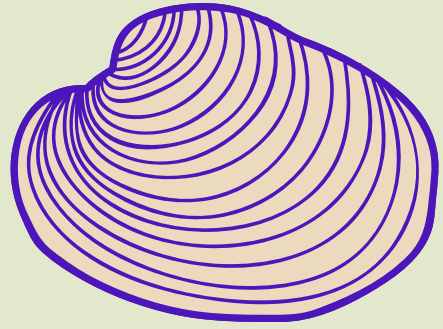




# WAMPUM

## What is a Wampum?

Emerging from Haudenosaunee culture Wampums, which are made from string and shells, represent ways in which people share history, navigate laws, and signify agreements with others.



## How Were Wampums Made?

The process of making historical Wampums beads was quite difficult and required focus and patience. Traditionally shells were drilled either from quahog shells, stone or reed, and then smoothed by a rock to create a cylindrical shape.

Different coloured beads symbolize different matters. White, for instance, signifies peace while purple signifies serious or political matters.

## Within Indigenous Communities

Traditionally, within Indigenous communities, the use of Wampums served many functions. For instance, Wampums served as an individual's credentials. Chiefs and Clan Mothers held them to signify their importance within the community. Within ceremonial practice, Wampums were presented to demonstrate a place of peace during meetings. Wampums were also presented to display messages from leaders.

To indicate peace, both Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Nations would display Wampums in clear view when travelling through other nations' territory or after war.

In addition to political significance, Wampums were also used to symbolize events or confirm relations and alliances. Wampums reflected a historical narrative within a nation or individual's history. Many Nations, like the Onondaga, had Wampum keepers, whose job it was to protect and interpret Wampum belts.

## Relations with Settlers

When Europeans settled Turtle Island, they began to monetize Wampums for trade. This kind of trade solidified a political and commercial relationships with many Indigenous communities. Dutch traders began to manufacture shells in the 17th century, lowering the value of the beads used by Indigenous nations. By the next century, British traders monetized Wampum beads and established exchange rates based on European currency and animal skins. Prior to colonization, Wampums were not seen as holding monetary value.

## Honouring Wampum

As a result of colonization, many Wampums have either been lost, sold to collectors, buried, or displayed in museums. Additionally, many misconceptions and Euro-centric theories have developed that equate the importance of Wampums with their monetary value. The truth is that Wampums symbolize the importance of historical and cultural narratives, political identity, and the declaration of relationships. For educational purposes, learning about Wampums through an appreciative lens encourages students to understand the culturally significant role Wampum played in determining how Nations governed, respected one another, and operated throughout history.

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