

Understanding Cultures,

Respecting Differences



Colonel Lee Learns a Lesson

Definitions

negotiation: the practice of meeting with another to settle some matter
diplomacy: the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations
diplomat: a person employed in negotiating between nations
protocol: a code, or set of accepted rules, of conduct in diplomacy

Instructions: Have students read the following essay, or read with them, and use the questions below for small group or whole class discussion.

In June and July of 1744, Conrad Weiser was on hand for the important treaty at Lancaster, where representatives of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia met with the Iroquois to establish a “chain of friendship” among the Indians and the three colonies, and to release a large section of Iroquois-held land to Virginia.

Attending the conference to represent his colony was a Colonel Thomas Lee from the distinguished Lee family of Virginia, an important figure in politics who had served as President of the Council, Commander in Chief and Acting Governor in Virginia. Kept waiting for several weeks for the Indians to arrive, Lee, a newcomer to Indian diplomacy, grew impatient and frustrated. He thought Conrad Weiser should be dismissed as interpreter. When the conference finally began, Lee and his fellow Virginia representatives, who were not familiar with the traditions and protocol to follow, seemed determined to act as superiors to the Indians and to intimidate them into giving up their land. Their attendants (servants & aides) made fun of the Indians. The entire southern group had to be warned by Pennsylvania’s governor that such a hostile approach could lead to war with the Iroquois.

Some of the newcomers, like Witham Marshe of Maryland, hoping to improve the mood at the conference, looked to Conrad Weiser for advice and guidance in how to act toward the natives at the meeting. He wrote:

Our interpreter, Mr. Weiser, desired us....not to talk much of the Indians, nor to laugh at their dress, or make any remarks on their behavior; if we did it would be very much resented by them, and might cause some differences to arise betwixt the white people and them. Besides, most of them understood English, though they will not speak it when they are in treaty. [From Wallace, *Conrad Weiser, Friend of Colonist & Mohawk*, Baltimore, 1996.]

Not everyone was as quick to understand the proper method of negotiating with the Indians. When Colonel Lee heard that Maryland was to begin the conference ahead of Virginia, he called for Conrad Weiser and requested that he influence the Indians with 30 pistoles (Spanish gold coins) to let Virginia go first in the negotiations --ahead of Maryland who had invited the Indians-- claiming that Virginia was the oldest colony, and had a right to go first. Weiser translated the Indians reply to Lee: they did not care who was oldest, and would stick with protocol, hearing the nation who invited them here to speak first. Lee stood corrected, and from this point on gained a great deal of respect for Weiser. He later wrote often to Weiser, wanting to learn all that he could about Indian customs and beliefs, and the interpreter wrote detailed letters back.

Discussion Questions

1. What was Colonel Thomas Lee's attitude toward the Indians when he arrived at the conference at Lancaster? How did he view Virginia's position at the conference?
2. Why do you think the servants and aides of the representatives from the south (Maryland and Virginia) behaved in the way they did?
3. How would an understanding of Indian customs and methods of negotiation have helped the Virginia negotiators?
3. Why is it important to understand the proper protocol in a meeting or diplomatic conference?
4. When meeting with another nation or people, what kinds of things should a nation and that nation's diplomats know about the other group?
5. Can you think of some examples today where problems exist because of differences between cultures?
6. What are some ways in which nations are working to understand different cultures are learning to respect these differences?

Teacher Notes

Questions 4 - 6 suggest comparisons between the relations between native and European cultures in the 18th century, and relations between different cultures in today's world. Newspapers report daily on areas of conflict stemming from these culture clashes and the need for a better understanding of others.

There are many opportunities to expand upon this activity sheet, using newspaper and magazine articles, TV news broadcasts, etc. to gather examples for discussion. Likewise, there are a number of international efforts being made to bridge culture gaps and encourage understanding that may be of interest to you and your students. Areas to investigate (a follow-up to Question #6) might include joint summer programs that have been arranged between Arab & Israeli children, and between Irish Protestant & Catholic children. Also, stories have appeared on local language instruction and clothing and headdress modifications for US military in Afghanistan and Arab regions.