



Guswenta - aka The Two Row Wampum

Wampum

Taken from information written by Alan Ojig Corbiere, former Executive Director of the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation in M'Chigeng, Manitoulin Island.

- Wampum is a small and short tubular shell bead made from a quahog shell. The beads were strung into strings or woven into belts. White beads were made from the inner whorl (columella) of the whelk Purple (also called black) beads were manufactured from the dark spot or "eye" on the quahog clam shell (found along the northeastern coast of the continent).
- Wampum is an example of the way in which Indigenous craft is tied oral tradition. For each wampum, there's a certain set of promises and/or stories that an assigned Carrier memorizes, and recites at the appropriate times. The design, and even the number of beads, acts as a **mnemonic device**, much like the picture-writing on the birch bark scrolls. The wampum keeper would hold the belt and read it by sight and touch and memory. The oral tradition of the wampum belts is a formal, highly allegorical diplomatic language.¹

A mnemonic device, is any learning technique that aids information retention. Mnemonics aim to translate information into a form that the human brain can retain better than its original form

- Business was conducted between Nations in an oral tradition that utilized mnemonic devices (wampum). The first group "read" or "recited" or "explained" the talk on the belt, and then the second group had a chance to "read" or "explain" the talk contained thereon. These days we say, "Now, everyone is on the same page" or perhaps they would say, "We are on the same belt." Another analogy would be that the committee reads the minutes from the last meeting.²

¹ Alan Corbiere, "Making Wampum Belts with Ken Maracle," *OJIBWE CULTURAL FOUNDATION*, Sept-Oct 2011, 5.

² Ibid, 8.