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# Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea) "He places two bets together"



## **Joseph Brant: Historical Terms and Vocabulary**

Define the word below as they are used in the passages. All sixteen appear in Parts 1-4 of "Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea)".

1. alliance
2. forging
3. disputes
4. territorial
5. superintendent
6. arable
7. encroaching
8. expansion
9. intermarried
10. intermediaries
11. unrest
12. entreaty
13. negotiations
14. ancestral
15. compensate
16. modified

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### Part 1

Joseph Brant was a prominent 18th century First Nations leader. As a Mohawk, he belonged to the Iroquois nation and played an important part in forging and maintaining their alliance with the British during the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution.

Joseph Brant was born in 1743 in what is now Cayahoga, Ohio. His Native name was Thayendanegea and he was the son of Tehowaghwengaraghkwin, reportedly a legendary warrior. His father died when he was just a toddler. His mother took Thayendanegea and his sister Konwatsitsiainni (known as Mary) to the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York, then still a British colony, where she had once lived. Joseph’s parents were descended from members of the Huron nation, kidnapped in Ontario by the Iroquois years before. It was not unusual for one tribe to raid another, killing men and kidnapping women and children. By the time Joseph and his sister were born, their family’s loyalty and identity was with the Iroquois.

With the arrival of the French and British in the 17th century, the lives of the Native peoples of northern North America were turned upside down. Many continued their way of life peacefully and others who lived near French or British settlements often engaged in disputes over land and territorial boundaries. The Mohawks were the easternmost tribe of the Iroquois (who called themselves the Haudenosaunee) and most of them lived in what is now New York State. Early on, the Iroquois sided with the British against the French. The allegiance continued during the Seven Years’ War and this allegiance would ultimately change their future.

Joseph and Mary’s mother married again after returning to the Mohawk Valley. Her new husband’s “English” name was Brant, probably a nickname for Bernard. Her young son, often known by his Christian name of Joseph, was called “Brant’s Joseph”. In time Thayendanegea acquired an English first name and a surname – Joseph Brant.

### **Discussion Point:**

*What do you think were some of the reasons the First Nations peoples chose to ally with either the French or the British?*

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## Part 2

Joseph Brant's sister Mary, also known as Molly, married General Sir William Johnson who was the British superintendent of Indian Affairs in the British colonies. At the time of their marriage France still ruled over a substantial part of North America. The eastern colonies along the Atlantic seaboard were British and their growth and prosperity meant that the people there were running out of arable land. Families were large and children were healthier than those in European cities, more often surviving childhood. Sons were expected to farm or take up a trade, but good land was running out. The colonists looked west to the fertile lands of the Ohio Valley and beyond, controlled mostly by the French. The colonists pressured Britain to drive the French out of North America which was accomplished at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

The war ended with Britain ruling most of northern North America, west to the Mississippi River. The British declared that the Ohio Valley would be reserved for Native Americans but this outraged the colonists to the east. Soon they were encroaching on Native land and skirmishes and raids ensued. The American colonists saw independence as the only way to control their destiny, which they felt lay in westward expansion.

When the Seven Years' War began in 1756, young Joseph, still a teenager, followed his brother-in-law into battle against the French. William Johnson realized young Joseph was extremely bright and a natural leader. Johnson decided Joseph would benefit from an education and sent him to a school established for Native Americans in Connecticut. It was there that Joseph became a Christian and learned to read and write English. The young man spoke three of the Six Nations languages (Six Nations is the English term for the Haudenosaunee) and became a highly valued interpreter.



*James Wolfe, who led the British victors at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, ending the Seven Years' War in North America.*

### **Discussion Point:**

*Joseph Brant was regarded as a "highly valued interpreter". Why do you think this skill would have been highly valued?*

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### Part 3

After the French were defeated at the end of the Seven Years' War, the British officials took stock of their new land north of the 13 Colonies. They were particularly interested in the forts that had been abandoned by the French. Many of the local First Nations peoples were not happy with this. They had formed alliances with the French and in many cases had intermarried with them. The French had not been interested in using the land around the Great Lakes for settlement. Their interest was in trading goods with the First Nations peoples. An unsuccessful rebellion was led by Chief Pontiac of the Anishinabe (also known as the Ottawa). After this, Joseph Brant was selected with three other young Mohawk men to further their education and language skills to serve as future intermediaries between the British and the First Nations peoples.

Sir William Johnson, Joseph's brother-in-law and superintendent of Indian affairs, had plans to send Joseph to Columbia University in New York City but Johnson died before this could happen. Another Johnson family member, Sir Guy Johnson, became superintendent of Indian affairs. Joseph became his secretary, or what we might today call his primary assistant.

Sir William Johnson had died only two years before the residents of the 13 Colonies declared independence in 1776. Unrest had been growing for some time. When the American Revolution began, Joseph Brant asked if he could go to England and talk to King George III in person. Brant greatly impressed the English court. though he refused to bow to the king, saying he himself was a king in his own right. Despite this, the British agreed to his entreaty that they support the Iroquois during the rebellion.

When Joseph returned to North America, he convinced many of the First Nations people to actively support the British against the rebellious colonies. He was worried that the rebels would take over Native lands. The Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, and Onondaga of the Six Nations agreed to fight with the British.

#### ***Discussion Point:***

*Why do you think Brant and other Native leaders were worried about losing their original lands to the American rebels?*

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#### Part 4

Joseph Brant organized a force of about three hundred Native warriors and one hundred loyal white settlers to fight with the British against the rebels. He and his men also helped Natives and Loyalists escape north into what is now Ontario. They also raided white settlements that encroached into what they considered their territory. In 1783 the British admitted defeat. The Iroquois people were ignored during negotiations that followed the end of the war. They had hoped to keep their ancestral lands in New York and to the west, but all land east of the Mississippi River became part of the new American nation. Brant and his followers were angry about this and pressured the British government to compensate their First Nations supporters.

The negotiations were complicated, partly because the Six Nations peoples had lived over a large area of what is now the northeastern and central United States. In the end, swaths of land on the Bay of Quinte and on the Grand River in what is now Ontario were granted to the Six Nations peoples. The city of Brantford on the Grand River was named in Joseph Brant's honour; it marked the place where he and his followers forded the river to settle their new territory. In all, the Six Nations were granted about 273,000 hectares of land in Ontario.

Due to the massive upheaval in the northeastern part of North America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, many First Nations people saw their traditional way of life modified. Joseph Brant encouraged his people to adapt to a way of life that was closer to that of the white settlers. They built a small church, a sawmill, and a school. Brant decided to sell or rent some of the land they had been granted to white settlers in order to raise cash for the Six Nations.

Joseph Brant remained as leader of the Six Nations people for many years. In 1795 he was given a pension by the British government. He moved his third wife and their large family to what is now Burlington, Ontario and built a substantial house there. Brant had servants and slaves (slavery was still legal in British colonies at that time). Their residence has been rebuilt and is now the Joseph Brant Museum, open to the public.

Joseph Brant died in 1807, at the age of sixty-five. He had lived a life of adventure and played an important part in North America's colonial history as well as the early days of the British settlement in central Canada. He was buried in the graveyard in the little Mohawk church in Brantford.



A portrait of Joseph Brant painted in 1786.

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### **Reading for Understanding**

1. Briefly discuss Thayendanegea's background and how he became known as Joseph Brant.
2. How was Brant involved in the Seven Years' War? What was the outcome of the war?
3. Why were the Native allies of the French upset after the end of the Seven Years' War?
4. Why do you think Joseph Brant wanted to speak to King George III in person? What kind of an impression did he make at court?
5. What role did Joseph Brant play during the American Revolution? What was the outcome for the Six Nations peoples?
6. Give three examples from the texts and from your own learning that show how the lives of the First Nations people of northern North America were changed by European colonization.