

Grade 1 Language

Oral Communication

Aboriginal Teaching Strategy

Circle Traditions – Talking Circle

Students learn the significance of talking circles for Aboriginal people. They participate in classroom talking circles focused on curriculum-related issues or other issues relevant to them.

Related Curriculum Policy

- *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language, 2006*

Specific Expectations

Listening to Understand

- 1.1 identify purposes for listening in a few different situations, formal and informal (e.g., to hear the sounds of language in songs, chants, and poems; to interact socially with classmates; to enjoy and understand a story read aloud by the teacher; to follow simple directions in large- and small-group settings; to exchange ideas with a peer in a paired sharing or small group)

Speaking to Communicate

- 2.4 choose appropriate words to communicate their meaning accurately and engage the interest of their audience (e.g., choose words relevant to the topic from the full range of their vocabulary, including new words used regularly in the classroom; use descriptive adjectives to clarify and add interest to a narrative; use inclusive language that conveys respect for all people)
- 2.6 identify some non-verbal cues, including facial expression, gestures, and eye contact, and use them in oral communications, appropriately and with sensitivity towards cultural differences, to help convey their meaning

Aboriginal Context

Circles represent important principles in the Aboriginal worldview and belief systems, namely, interconnectedness, equality, and continuity. According to traditional teaching, the seasonal pattern of life and renewal and the movement of animals and people were continuous, like a circle, which has no beginning and no end. Circles suggest inclusiveness and the lack of a hierarchy. They are found throughout nature – for instance, in the movement of the seasons and the sun’s movement from east to west during the day. Circles are also used in the construction of teepees and sweat lodges; and the circular willow hoop, medicine wheel, and dream catcher are powerful symbols.

Talking circles symbolize completeness and equality. All circle participants' views must be respected and listened to. All comments directly address the question or the issue, not the comments another person has made.

In the circle, an object that symbolizes connectedness to the land – for example, a stick, a stone, or a feather – can be used to facilitate the circle. Only the person holding the “talking stick” has the right to speak. Participants can indicate their desire to speak by raising their hands. Going around the circle systematically gives everyone the opportunity to participate. Silence is also acceptable – any participant can choose not to speak.

Teaching Strategies

- Have students sit in a circle and ask them to identify circles that they have noticed in nature during each season.
- Discuss the significance of the circle to Aboriginal peoples. Introduce the talking circle and the talking stick, and discuss appropriate behaviour in the circle.
- Have students discuss how to be a responsible member of a talking circle, and use a Y-chart to record their ideas.

Teacher prompts: What should a talking circle sound like? How should it feel to participate in one?

- Conduct talking circles in the classroom to discuss current issues, build trust among students, and/or discuss responses to stories. Talking circles should last from seven to ten minutes, but could be longer if an issue or topic requires more time. *Sample topics:* what makes me happy, sad, angry, or excited; my favourite activities and why they are favourites; why my friend is special; why my family is important to me; what this story reminds me of; who this character reminds me of; which other book this one reminds me of and why.

Resources

Benton-Banai, Edward. *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway*. Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications, Inc., 1988. ISBN: 1-893487-00-8. A classic non-fiction text that sets out the traditional teachings of the Ojibway people of the Fish Clan.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *The Learning Circle: Classroom Activities on First Nations in Canada, Ages 4–7 and 8–11*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2000.
http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ach/lr/ks/llecir/activi1_e.html.

Making Community Connections

- Invite an Aboriginal person to the classroom to discuss the importance of circles in Aboriginal culture.

ABOUT THE TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

This teaching strategy is one component of *Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher's Toolkit*, a collection of resources designed to help Ontario educators bring Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom. Based on the revised Ontario curriculum, the collection includes resources for educators at both the elementary and secondary levels. Other resources in this series can be found on the ministry website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

