

Grade 5 Language

Oral Communication

Aboriginal Teaching Strategy

Talking Circle

Students discuss a work of literature, using an Aboriginal talking circle.

Related Curriculum Policy

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

Specific Expectations

Speaking to Communicate

- 2.2 demonstrate an understanding of appropriate speaking behaviour in a variety of situations, including paired sharing, dialogue, and small- and large-group discussions (e.g., ask questions to clarify understanding before responding; respond to a group member's comment by making a personal connection to their own experience; show awareness of and sensitivity towards the background and experiences of other group members when expressing their own views)

Aboriginal Context

Talking circles are a non-hierarchical form of dialogue. Participants sit in a circle, which symbolizes completeness, and discuss a topic. The thoughts and feelings of all participants are valued equally. The seating arrangement allows all participants to see each other's non-verbal cues. A natural object, such as a stone, stick, or feather, is passed to whoever is speaking during the discussion. Its purpose is to indicate who is speaking.

Teaching Strategies

- Ask students what they know about Aboriginal talking circles.
- Tell students how talking circles work, explaining that everyone in the circle is equal, that an object is held by the speaker as he or she speaks, that only the person holding the object may speak, that everyone must listen to the speaker without saying anything, that everything that is said is accepted, that those who prefer not to speak may pass the object to the next person, and that what is said in the circle is about the topic being discussed, not a response to what a speaker has said.
- Have students sit in a circle.
- Introduce a topic related to a work of literature the students are studying.

- Pass an object to a student and tell him or her to begin the discussion and have the discussion continue until all who want to speak have spoken.
- Repeat the process to allow students to respond to the ideas presented during the first round.
- Close the circle by thanking everyone for sharing their thoughts.
- Have students write about the discussion in their journal, telling them to describe how they felt about the experience and what they learned from this particular circle.

Resources

Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking. *Talking Circles*. http://rjp.umn.edu/img/assets/13522/Talking_Circles.pdf. Detailed information about the purpose of talking circles and how to manage them.

Ross, Rupert. *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996. ISBN: 9780143055594. Sensitive presentation of issues related to Aboriginal justice.

Making Community Connections

- Contact a local Friendship Centre or First Nation community to invite someone with knowledge of talking circles to visit the class.
- Contact the local police service for information on how talking circles, restorative justice, sentencing circles, and victim offender meetings are being used in the justice system.

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.

