

The Talking Circle

In many Native-American Nations, a “talking circle” is formed when a community wants to discuss an issue at a public gathering. The participants form a circle usually in the center of a room or around a fire. Each person in the talking circle shares his or her perspective on an issue, while the others listen respectfully.

At the beginning of each talking circle, everyone stands in a circle around the “talking stick.” One participant takes the talking stick and begins the opening ceremony by saying:

*My name is _____.
I am an important part of the talking circle,
and the talking circle is an important part of my life .*

The talking stick is passed to the next person. Each member of the circle repeats the words given above until the stick has made it around the circle. The stick is placed on a table in the middle of the group and individuals are then invited to pick up the stick and make brief, focused comments to the group. (Remind the students that they may need to be patient in waiting for an opportunity to pick up the stick and talk - this is part of being respectful of everyone's right to speak.)

As each one speaks, he/she holds the talking stick and the others listen respectfully without interrupting. The stick is returned to the center of the table after each comment. Each person in turn speaks his or her truth.

The key to this process is to speak up when it is your moment and to “project active listening” when it is someone else's time.

When the comments are over, the talking stick is placed back on its table in the center of the group. Everyone gathers around the talking stick and reaches in to touch it. Then the entire group says, in unison:

*I am an important part of the talking circle,
and the talking circle is an important part of my life.*

Four Rules:

1. Speak honestly and truthfully from the heart.
2. Be brief and focused in making comments, listen attentively.
3. One person talks at a time. Everyone listens to the person talking without interrupting.
4. Be supportive of each other and encourage each other.

