

The Story of the Talking Stick

The story of the talking stick originated from five Native American tribes: the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, and the Onandaga. These tribes all lived in what is now upper New York State, near the shores of Lake Ontario. But, in those days, these tribes were all fighting each other, having terrible wars. People were dying and suffering from starvation. A very great man named Deganawidah finally helped them learn to make a peace agreement among the five tribes. He became known as the Great Peacemaker.

*Deganawidah told the people that he would plant a Great Tree of Peace to help the five tribes find peace. The branches would protect the people, and the "white roots of truth" would reach out to the four directions carrying the news of peace. First, he invited the warriors from all the tribes to bury their weapons of war in the ground. Then he planted the tree over the weapons and the warriors sat down to make their **peace agreement**.*

The peace agreement took a very long time, years! But finally, after much talking and listening to each other, they formed the Iroquois Confederacy. It was such an important agreement that it inspired other agreements such as the United States Constitution and the United Nations Charter

*Deganawidah believed that it was very important for each person wishing to speak to be carefully listened to because everyone's ideas are valuable. When they listened carefully from their hearts, and spoke truthfully from their hearts, the people were able to make peace. Today we call that special listening **active listening**.*

*To help the people work together, Deganawidah brought powerful symbols of peace. One tradition was to pass something important around the circle to show who was speaking from his or her heart. Some Native Americans began to use a **talking stick**. They passed the talking stick around the circle when they had a **council**.*

*A council was, and still is, a time, like a special meeting, to share thoughts and feelings about an important subject. The council works as an important way to solve problems because it is a special time for listening to everyone. When people have councils to listen and talk from their hearts, then there is no need to fight and to have wars. The listening **with respect and caring for everyone** is the important part of using the talking stick to help to solve problems. Deganawidah knew the power of listening with respect and he brought us this way to solve problems without fighting.*

The Talking Stick

1. Everyone has an opportunity to speak
2. The process encourages everyone to listen more carefully.
3. When everyone has a turn, it reduces competition for time and attention
4. It builds trust and safety in community
5. The process includes respect for others ideas and contributions.