

# 6 What Tribes Are and How They Work

*When looking for a classroom program that was culturally compatible with First Nation beliefs and values, Tribes was recommended. It surpassed our expectations. Tribes honours the sacred circle in which all people come together. Tribes has helped us teach the children how to be kind and to own their responsibilities. It is helping us to talk and listen to one another, as the old ones still do.*

—LAURA HORTON,  
NATIVE STUDENT  
RETENTION  
COORDINATOR  
FORT FRANCES-RAINY  
RIVER, BOARD  
OF EDUCATION,  
ONTARIO, CANADA

*A Native American teacher, Paula Swift Robin, is talking with four other teachers at a conference in eastern Washington. “What is the most exciting thing you are doing in your classroom?” asks one of her new friends. Paula leans forward excitedly. “You’ll never believe the gift that came my way. Two years ago I went to the annual used book sale at our town library, and my eye was attracted to a worn book called “Tribes.” Must be about Native Americans, I said to myself. I bought it, took it home, and was so very surprised! It’s about using small groups, called tribes, as a way to involve kids to help each other learn and to feel good about themselves. Our students took to it right away, and we wove in studies about our Native American tribes throughout the year. It’s made amazing changes for our kids. It’s the caring and challenge they long for...a lot like the closeness that our own people have depended upon throughout time.”*

*y*es, this is a true story. What Paula didn’t realize was that the teacher at the table who kept beaming a big smile back at her while she talked was also a Tribes TLC® Trainer.

## ABOUT CALLING THE PROCESS “TRIBES”

At times our Native American friends have asked why this interactive learning process is called Tribes. It’s hard to remember exactly when it happened. Throughout the years people who experienced the caring, community-building process kept saying, “This is like being in a family...not a team but a tribe.” People appreciated the social support, the respect for individual differences, and the sense of belonging that indigenous tribes seem to have. The process of Tribes seems to symbolize the affection and caring that so many of us in Western society long for today.

Ron Patrick, Native American Certified Tribes Trainer has graciously written the article that follows to give a perspective on the cultural values signified by the word “tribes,” not only used by Native Americans but by indigenous people around the world. This new edition of the Tribes book is being used by First Nation, Inuit, Native American, Hawaiian, Australian Aboriginal, Micronesian, Dominican Republic and South American Certified Tribes Trainers and teachers throughout an ever-growing population of schools. Why? Many simply reply, “It’s a people process.”

## Why the Name “Tribes”

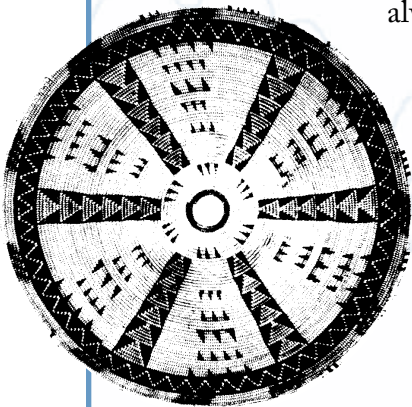
The word “tribes” means very different things to people around the world. Indigenous people in the four directions of the world use “tribes” with special meaning and cultural significance. My tribe, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, consider being part of the tribe a birth rite and not something someone can join. A person is born into this relationship. The formal definition of the word “tribe” is given in the Cambridge International Dictionary of English as “a group of people often of related families who live together, share the same language, culture, and heritage—especially those who do not live in towns or cities.” Thus, from Africa, from Europe, to Asia, to Australia, to North America, to South America, and other parts of the world indigenous people consider the word “tribe” a formal word with special relational meaning often defining similarities and uniqueness. The values that most tribes hold focus around fairness, family, respect, responsibility, and positive relationships.

Due to a deep respect for the teachings and wisdom of native cultures around the world, the word came into use as the name for the developmental learning process developed by Jeanne Gibbs. This process is a way of being together helping each other teach our children to live a life based on time-honored values in caring, safe and supportive environments.

The word “tribes” also has been used in an “informal” manner. The informal definition (also from the Cambridge Dictionary) defines the meaning as “a large family or other group that someone belongs to.” The process known as “Tribes” helps us to create “belonging” for children in schools and other organizations. It helps us as parents and teachers to teach the deep values of respect, responsibility, and relationship skills. No other word seems to come close to conveying the same hope and meaning. This process known simply as “Tribes” honors children. It seeks to make children’s lives and their children’s lives better.

As a person of native heritage I have been taught to always talk from my heart. I am honored to say that the Tribes learning process uses the word “tribes” with great respect. It is not a characterization, nor an attempt to steal an important cultural icon from our peoples. It comes from a place of deep respect and regard for both the word “tribe” and all indigenous people around the world.

May you walk in Beauty,  
Asgaya Tawodi Digadoli  
Ron Patrick



## FROM A PSYCHOLOGIST'S VIEW



### Ron Patrick, M.Ed.

Ron is an ecological/systems psychologist and a Tribes TLC® Trainer. He has worked with school and mental health communities for 33 years, most recently as Director of Psychological and Student Services. He also served as a consultant/coach with the Mid-Eastern Ohio Regional Resource Center where he focused on primary preventive mental health, systems change, and literacy programs. As a Native American, Ron believes that the Tribes TLC® process honors his cultural values and the tradition of deep respect within native spiritual practice.