Rhetoric and Civil Discourse Extension Opportunities and Assessment Activities

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Overview

Currently, in our polarized world, it is increasingly important for high school students to develop a sense of their own intrapersonal rhetoric. This takes emotional awareness, practice, and ongoing reflection that cannot be effectively evaluated by one assessment tool. With this in mind, we have developed some suggested assessment activities and extension opportunities that can be easily adapted. Each activity points students toward synthesizing their knowledge of rhetoric in practical and engaging ways while maintaining a focus on one's intrapersonal rhetoric and listening skills.

Recommended Opportunities for Assessment

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ESSAY

Students will choose 2 speeches that share different viewpoints on a particular topic. Then, they will analyze the terministic screens of the speakers and evaluate the effectiveness of their speeches in engaging different listeners. Students will consider the impact of kairos in each speech and give any recommendations they may have concerning the speaker's rhetorical timing.

RHETORIC IN THE MEDIA JOURNAL

Students will keep a journal that analyzes rhetoric in news, media, and/or entertainment. This journal will document what they observe and include the rhetorical characteristics and terministic screens of speakers. It will also explore the ways in which diverse listeners are being engaged in the topic (or not). After completing this, students will reflect on how this activity has impacted or changed their own viewpoints on news, media, and/or entertainment.

RHETORICAL PODCAST SERIES

In a small group, students will create a podcast series (3 or more episodes) that address real-world stories about challenges in civil communication. Speakers in each episode

should model strong civil discourse and listening skills. Each episode should also contain a 3–5 minute reflection in which participants reflect on their own use of listening skills, kairos, terministic screens, and emotional intelligence.

ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF LISTENING

Students will create a series of artistic representations (sculptures, paintings, drawings, etc.) that showcase the spectrum of listening. The project should include artwork that represents open curiosity, hopeful engagement, calculation, fearful submission, and rigidly fixed listening patterns. When the series is complete, students will write a reflection that explains the artistic techniques they used to show the spectrum of listening.

RHETORICAL DRAMA

In small groups of 4–5, students will write and perform a skit that shows what happens when a person doesn't pay attention to kairos, terministic screens, or intrapersonal rhetoric. The tone of the skit could be funny or dramatic if students clearly portray what happens when a rhetorical situation goes awry. After performing their skit for other students (or filming it themselves), students will write individual reflections on the activity that include their own listening and speaking skills during the group project.

Recommended Extension Activities

REAL-TIME RESPONSE JOURNAL

In a graphic organizer, students will track their internal responses to a live event (a speech, town hall, meeting, panel presentation, live conversation on social media, etc.). Observation points will include student thoughts about conversation patterns, listening patterns, and their metacognitive awareness of critical thinking. Student thoughts could be collected in a graphic organizer such as the one below.

	What conversation patterns do I notice?	How well am I listening? What questions do I have?	Am I engaging in self-interested or fair-minded critical thinking?
Observation 1			
Observation 2			
Observation 3			

CHALLENGING THE ECHO CHAMBER

Students will conduct research and observe a platform where they routinely receive and/ or share information. Then, they will reflect on areas in which particular ways of thinking may not be presented or challenged. Following this, students will create a toolkit for anyone on the platform. This will have strategies and suggestions for users to engage in fair-minded critical thinking that values different viewpoints and perspectives.

RHETORICAL TIME MACHINE

STEP 1

Students will choose a significant historical event and research that event through primary sources, constructing a strong understanding of the various stakeholders involved.

STEP 2

Students will reimagine the communication included in the event and "translate" it for a modern audience. This can be done through sample digital media, such as podcast clips, short video clips, blog posts, online news sources, or social media posts. All communication materials must maintain the historical voice even though they are being reimagined in modern communication spaces.

STEP 3

Students will compare/contrast the modern strategies and historical avenues for communication. They will consider the ways in which listening and thinking critically about the messages received is impacted by the following:

- Speed in which information is spread
- Manner in which an audience receives information
- Platform's ability to accommodate diverse viewpoints
- Potential for others to manipulate the speaker's intended message

STEP 4

After their analysis, students will present their findings in a poster presentation, Google Slides presentation, or written essay. Their final product should contain key reflections and takeaways from their engagement with historical documents and their subsequent "translation" of the messages surrounding key events.

WHAT TIME IS IT?

Using the AWARE framework, students will observe a real-world conversation and analyze the timing of those engaged in conversation. They will record their thoughts on an observation template such as the one below.

When did someone . . .	**A**ssert their opinion?	**W**onder about another's thoughts?	**A**ccept a different viewpoint?	**R**espect the dignity of another person?	**E**stablish a goal for the conversation?
Description of the moment observed					
Explain why kairos was or was not present					

DIGITAL CONVERSATION DESIGN

Students will design a hypothetical in-person or online space for civil conversation. After researching the strengths and weaknesses in existing spaces (such as social media, town halls, school board meetings, etc.), students will design their spaces and include clear guidelines for the community, a design for moderation, and intentional systems of reward. Students must create tools for productive disagreement as well as a plan for building community across diverse perspectives. These materials should be placed in a folder (digital or otherwise), and a Google Slides deck should be prepared so that students can share their space for civil conversation with others.