



Rhetoric and Emotional Intelligence

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Overview

This lesson helps students understand the relationship between emotional intelligence, rhetoric, and conflict resolution. Drawing from the wisdom of Epictetus, this lesson creates opportunities for students to examine how their emotional responses can impact their ability to communicate effectively with others. Reflecting on their own experiences, this lesson teaches students that emotional intelligence is a vital part of communication and civil discourse, particularly during challenging conversations.



Essential Questions

- What is the purpose of rhetoric?
- What's the value of rhetoric for civil discourse?
- How can rhetoric be a bridge that connects people with diverse viewpoints?

Materials

- Journal
- Whiteboard or chart paper
- A list of emotionally charged scenarios

Learning Objectives

- Understand how our emotions affect our intrapersonal (internal) rhetoric
- Explain the role of emotional intelligence when engaging in a rhetorical situation

Warm-Up

STEP 1

Review the definitions of intrapersonal and interpersonal rhetoric with students.

STEP 2

Write or project the following quotation by Epictetus on the board.

"Remember that it is not he who gives abuse or blows who affronts, but the view we take of these things as insulting. When, therefore, anyone provokes you, be assured that it is your own opinion which provokes you. Try, therefore, in the first place, not to be bewildered by appearances. For if you once gain time and respite, you will more easily command yourself."

—EPICTETUS

STEP 3

Explain that Epictetus was a Greek philosopher who encouraged stoicism. Because of this, he thought deeply about how inner thoughts, or intrapersonal rhetoric, affect how we act.

STEP 4

Ask students: Knowing this, what are your thoughts in response to these questions?

- What part of this quotation speaks to the role that intrapersonal rhetoric plays in how we act?
- Do you agree or disagree with Epictetus when he says that it is your own opinion that provokes you to be insulted, not another person? Why?

Explore

Write or project the following journal prompt on the board.

Journal prompt: In your journal, write about a conflict or an argument you have been a part of. Be as detailed as possible in your description, and make sure your entry includes the following elements:

- The setting of the conflict
- The situation (Why did the conflict begin? What caused the argument?)
- What stake did you have in the argument? What stake did the other person have?
- The resolution of the conflict (if it was resolved)

Note: You will share this journal entry with a classmate, so be aware of what you share.

DISCUSS

Let each student discuss their journal entry with a partner. Then, ask for feedback and reactions to the exercise.

ASK

- What role do you think intrapersonal rhetoric plays in this situation (how did you talk to yourself about the situation)?
- What role do you think interpersonal rhetoric plays in this situation (how did you talk with others)?

Note: If needed, take a moment to remind students of the definitions of intrapersonal and interpersonal rhetoric by writing the definitions on the board or asking students to look back at their notes from the previous lesson.

Allow several students to share their thoughts with the whole class. and be sure that students remember that rhetoric involves using the available means of persuasion to achieve a goal.

Apply

To better understand the ways that internal rhetoric and one's interpretation of an event influence our emotional responses, ask students to individually complete the following table.

Scenario	Emotions I felt right away	Immediate thoughts about the scenario
You posted a photo from a weekend hangout in which you're genuinely happy and feeling good about yourself. Someone comments, "trying too hard 😊."		
You notice that your 3 closest friends have started a new group chat without you.		
You volunteer an answer in class that you're confident about, but several students snicker.		
You overhear someone describing your style as "interesting" with a laugh.		
Your parent compares you to a sibling or cousin regarding grades/activities.		

SAY

Create groups of 3–4 students and analyze each scenario by responding to these questions.

- What assumptions are you making about the person or people involved in the situation?
- Are there any other interpretations that could explain this scenario?
- Is there any information you might be missing?

DEBRIEF

Ask students to share what they noticed about their responses to the scenarios in their small groups. What was new or surprising? What thoughts or assumptions changed when you asked more questions about the situations?

Connect

Remind students of this quote by [Francis Bacon](#).

“The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will.”

In small groups or with partners, have students discuss the following questions:

- How does Bacon's idea connect to Epictetus's thoughts about our internal reactions?
- What role does emotional intelligence play in our response to conflict?
- How does emotional intelligence help us have civil conversations?

Closing the Lesson

STEP 1

Have students take out a piece of notebook paper or hand out notecards.

STEP 2

Ask students to create a “mantra” or a 1 sentence reminder that will help them reflect before reacting emotionally.

Example: Before reacting, I ask myself: “What is the story I am telling myself about this situation?”

This can be students' exit ticket, or they can keep it for future reminders.

Common Core State Standards

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1:** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B:** Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D:** Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6:** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6:** Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.