



What Is Kairos?

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Overview

This lesson builds off previous lessons on emotional intelligence and terministic screens—the way one “filters” the world around them. Using hands-on activities, students will discover the value of kairos (the most opportune time to speak or act) in conversation. They will have multiple opportunities to engage with real-world examples that prompt them to think about the role of timing in rhetorical situations. This exploration will create space for discussions that connect the concept of kairos to the value of being emotionally aware of oneself and one’s situation, especially when seeking to effectively engage in challenging conversations with diverse viewpoints.



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
- AWARE framework
- Scenarios about content-related (or student-relevant) issues

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of kairos in having and maintaining civil discourse with diverse viewpoints
- Explain why terministic screens affect one's ability to discern the "most opportune time"
- Demonstrate the use of kairos in a small group discussion about a difficult topic

Warm-Up

Brainstorm historically popular phrases that may have worked at one time but may sound out of date now. Write these examples on the board. If you are having difficulty coming up with ideas, a few phrases that may get you started are:

- "Don't touch that dial!" (Refers to changing a channel using a TV dial)
- "You sound like a broken record." (Refers to a warped record that might repeat the same sounds over and over)
- "Be kind, rewind." (Refers to ensuring a VHS movie began at the beginning before returning it to a rental store)
- "Roll down the window." (Refers to rotating a handle to roll down the window of older cars)
- "That's keen!" or "Gee whiz!" (Phrases that were popular in the United States in the 1950s)
- "That's the cat's pajamas!" (Phrase in the United States in the 1930s that meant something of high quality)
- "You're the bee's knees!" (Phrase in the United States in the 1930s that meant a highly admired person)

Then, write or project the following prompt on the board or a piece of chart paper.

Journal prompt: Choose 1 of the following phrases written on the board and answer the following questions in your journal. You may need to use the internet to learn more about the phrase you chose in order to answer the prompts.

- When was your chosen phrase popular?
- What did your phrase mean, or why was it used?
- If you used that phrase now, what do you think the response might be? How might family members respond? How might friends respond? Why?

When all students have finished writing in their journals, ask them to share their thoughts with a partner.

Explore

STEP 1

Ask students to think about the phrases they just discussed and share their thoughts about the role that time plays in phrases like these. Allow a few students to offer their ideas and guide students to the idea that using speech that is appropriate for a specific time and place is a key part of persuasion.

Note: You can remind students that rhetoric uses the available means of persuasion to achieve a goal. When you time your words well, you are using some of the “available means of persuasion” at your disposal. The best moment for a specific word or action to be performed is called *kairos*. Some people use the phrase “that was *kairotic*” to say that the action they observed was the best one for that moment.

STEP 2

Transition to the next activity by telling students they are going to practice thinking about *kairos*.

Ask for 5 volunteers to perform a “freeze-frame” scenario. Give each volunteer 1 of the following actions.

- Raising your hand
- Opening the door
- Standing up
- Taking out your phone
- Closing your book or laptop
- Putting on headphones/earbuds

SAY

Each volunteer will perform an action and freeze. Then, we will predict what should happen, what could go wrong, what the best timing is for the next action, and when this action would show bad timing.

DEBRIEF

Following the activity, discuss the connection between kairos (timing) and terministic screens. You may want to pair students or have a whole-group discussion. The following questions may be used to prompt conversations.

- How might a person's terministic screen affect when an action is taken? For instance, how might a person's terministic screen affect the time one chooses to take out a phone? Or put on headphones?
- How might one's culture or background affect one's terministic screen, and how might that impact how one views the "best" moment?
- When have your values or beliefs impacted your understanding of the "best" time?
- How might one's terministic screen and perception of the right time to act or speak affect a conversation with multiple viewpoints?

Connect

Tell students that kairos is important to consider when we think about how to have civil conversations with one another.

STEP 1

Connect the idea of kairos to the AWARE framework (as explained in Sphere's [Civil Discourse Primer](#)). Share each word of the AWARE acronym and show how each word shows one way to engage in conversation.

A = Assert your opinion

W = Wonder about others' ideas and thoughts

A = Accept that others have different opinions

R = Respect the dignity of the other person

E = Establish a goal for the conversation

STEP 2

Tell students that each word in the acronym needs to be used with kairos in mind because it is important to be mindful and aware of timing in order to engage in civil conversation.

For example, even though asserting your opinion is at the beginning of the AWARE framework, it is not always appropriate to begin by immediately asserting your thoughts.

Or, if you know you are entering a conversation with people who strongly disagree with one another, it may be best to begin by establishing a clear outcome or goal for the group's discussion. In other words, using the AWARE framework to engage in civil discourse must be informed by the speaker's knowledge and awareness of kairos.

PRACTICE

STEP 1

Pose several scenarios that might cause some disagreement among students. You could create some scenarios that are specific to your content area or use more general ones, such as the examples below.

- A student committee has been created to determine whether a majority of the student council funds should go toward the art and theater departments or sports.
- Your group has been assembled on behalf of the student body, and you have been asked to determine how these funds should be allocated.
- The school board is meeting to determine whether or not cellphone use is permitted inside the school. You are on a student committee that has been chosen to represent the student body at the upcoming board meeting.
- Your school is deciding whether to discontinue open campus lunch privileges, and your group has been commissioned to give an opinion to the principal about this topic.
- You are on the dance committee, and your group is determining the theme for the upcoming winter dance. What theme do you choose and why?

STEP 2

Have students form small groups and give them 1 scenario to discuss. While students are discussing the topic of their scenario, they should actively use the AWARE framework to note when they assert their opinion, wonder about other people's ideas, accept another person's point of view, respect the dignity of a person who thinks differently, and establish a goal with their conversation partners.

DISCUSS

After students have been given time to have their conversations and note the timing of their contributions, lead the whole class in a discussion about their experiences. The following questions may serve as a guide.

- What did you notice about when it was appropriate/not appropriate to speak during the conversation?
- Were there times when you wanted to say something but it didn't seem right? Were there times when you said something that seemed awkward or a little "off"?

- What role did context play in your decision to speak or not speak at specific times?
- How did you know when it was a good time to jump into the conversation?

The goal of this discussion is to help students reflect on how emotional intelligence, intrapersonal rhetoric, and understanding terministic screens help us know when to jump into a conversation.

SAY

The AWARE framework helps us understand how we can engage in discussions with multiple viewpoints if we are mindful of kairos, or the most opportune moment to speak.

Closing the Lesson

To wrap up the lesson, ask the following questions of students individually (as an exit ticket) or as a whole class:

- In your own words, what does “kairos” mean?
- How is a person’s perception of kairos affected by one’s terministic screen?
- What role does kairos play in helping us have and maintain civil discourse?

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.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.9-10.3:** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- **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.