



Rhetorical Listening

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Overview

This lesson explores the idea of rhetorical listening with the goal of helping students develop practical skills for engaging in civil discourse. Designed for a full 90-minute period or two 50-minute periods, this lesson begins with a visual literacy activity in which students interpret the series of Claude Monet's "Haystack" paintings as a spectrum. This thought is then applied to listening so that students see that listening is much more than simply hearing the words. Drawing from Wayne C. Booth's ideas of rhetorical listening, students will learn about the variations, purposes, and characteristics of listening. Students will understand that engaging in civil discourse requires more than just hearing what someone says; it calls for an approach that seeks to be open and curious to thoughtfully communicate with diverse viewpoints in the marketplace of ideas.



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
- Monet's Series of "Haystack" paintings from The Art Institute of Chicago
- Video clips that demonstrate types of listening

Learning Objectives

- Define the term "rhetorical listening"
- Identify the variations of rhetorical listening as described by Booth
- Explain why rhetorical listening is important for engaging in civil discourse

Warm-Up

Write or project the following prompt on the board or screen.

Journal prompt: Read the following quotation by Booth: "I am not just seeking a truce; I want to pursue the truth behind our differences." Then, respond to the following questions in your journal.

- According to Booth, what is the purpose of communication?
- What is the difference between "seeking a truce" and "pursuing the truth behind our differences?" Do you think this is an important distinction? Why or why not?

Discuss your journal entry with a partner. Be sure to listen carefully to one another's thoughts and reasoning.

DEBRIEF

Ask several students to share their thoughts. Then, as a class, discuss the connections between Booth's thoughts and listening.

Explain that listening is an important part of the exchange of ideas that happens in the marketplace of ideas.

SAY

In this lesson, we will explore the role that rhetorical listening plays in civil conversations. Listening is a vital piece of rhetoric because it is how we better understand and communicate with others who have diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

Listening Is a Spectrum

STEP 1

Give students a handout of the series of Monet's "Haystack" paintings.

STEP 2

Display the slide on the board or screen, and give students time to observe each painting. Ask students to respond to the following questions:

- What colors do you notice in each painting? How are they similar and different?
- What emotions do these paintings evoke? What emotions do you think Monet wanted to invoke through these paintings?

DEBRIEF

Discuss the paintings with the whole class. Ask several students to share their thoughts about the spectrum of colors used in each and throughout the collection.

EXPLORE

Keep Monet's "Haystack" paintings visible, and group students into pairs or small groups. In their groups, students should analyze the paintings and discuss how they would arrange the paintings. (*Handout 1 at the end of the lesson*)

ASK

- What painting would be first?
- What painting would be last?
- What feature(s) did you use to arrange the paintings?

Possible ways to arrange the paintings include darkest to lightest; cool colors to warm colors; most dramatic to most serene; winter weather to fall weather; or morning to evening.

DISCUSS

Have students share their arrangements with the class. Encourage students to see their arrangements as paintings on a spectrum (of weather, time of day, color, etc.), rather than pieces of artwork that fit into a specific category.

ASK

- Why can these paintings be arranged in different ways?
- What is the difference between placing items on a spectrum instead of in categories?
- Are there clear divisions between each painting on your spectrum?

SAY

Similar to how Monet shows a visual spectrum of light, time, and color, listening exists on a spectrum. Booth, a rhetorician and academic, studied this and called it rhetorical listening.

Note: If teaching a class that is shorter than a block period, this is a great place to stop. Be sure to review the idea of listening as a spectrum again with students before engaging in the next activity.

Rhetorical Listening

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

SAY

Rhetorical listening is a kind of listening that goes beyond just hearing what someone is saying. It involves the way we approach listening, depending on our own intentions, purposes, and self-talk. In fact, according to Booth, the way we approach listening falls across a spectrum of purpose that ranges from open and curious to rigid and fixed. The names of these purposes have been adapted for a high school audience.



ENGAGE

STEP 1

Give students a graphic organizer with a table like the one below.

Type of rhetorical listening	Characteristics of listening
Openly curious	
Hopefully engaging	
Calculating	
Fearfully submissive	
Rigidly fixed	

STEP 2

Watch several video clips or listen to a few podcast clips that demonstrate different kinds of rhetorical listening. Some suggested videos and podcast clips include the following:

- Select episodes from NPR's Story Corps
- *60 Minutes* clip: "Where Sir David Attenborough Draws His Optimism"
- Selected clips from *Undivide Us*
- *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* clip: "No Place in a Man's World"
- Selected clips from "Senator Joe McCarthy on 'Face the Nation' in 1954"

STEP 3

As a class, brainstorm characteristics that correspond to the type of listening in the right-hand column. Note: Because listening is a spectrum, there will be characteristics that overlap.

DISCUSS

Put students in groups of 3–4 and ask them to discuss the following questions.

- What similarities and differences do you find among the characteristics of each type of listening?
- Why might someone engage in each type of listening? For instance, what might motivate someone to listen with open curiosity at one point and fearful submissiveness at another?
- What type of listening is best for engaging in civil conversation? Why?
- What type of listening is best for responsible engagement in the marketplace of ideas? Why?

DEBRIEF

After students discuss, let several students share their thoughts with the whole class. Guide students to an understanding that being open and curious is an important part of using "the available means of persuasion" at one's disposal.

Closing the Lesson

Project or write Booth's quotation from the beginning of class onto the board.

"I am not just seeking a truce; I want to pursue the truth behind our differences."

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

- Thinking about this quotation, what role does listening play in pursuing "the truth behind our differences"?
- What kind of listening is the most helpful for engaging in difficult conversations with different viewpoints? Why?
- How does listening impact your internal or intrapersonal rhetoric?
- How do you think listening can help you be more civil in your discourse?

Common Core State Standards

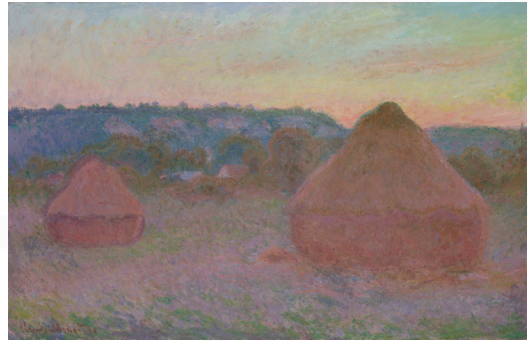
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D:** Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3:** 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.
- **VA:RE.7.1.HSII.A:** Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.
- **VA:RE.7.2.HSI.A:** Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.
- **VA:RE.7.2.HSII.A:** Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

Claude Monet's Haystack Paintings Student Handout

- Look at the following paintings of haystacks by Claude Monet. What would be the best way to arrange these paintings? Decide what order they should go in by writing the numerical order of each painting in the box beside it.



CLAUDE MONET, **STACK OF WHEAT**, 1890–1891, OIL ON CANVAS, 25 15/16 × 36 3/8 IN. (65.8 × 92.3 CM), SEARLE FAMILY TRUST; MAJOR ACQUISITIONS CENTENNIAL ENDOWMENT; THROUGH PRIOR ACQUISITIONS OF THE MR. AND MRS. MARTIN A. RYERSON AND POTTER PALMER COLLECTIONS; THROUGH PRIOR BEQUEST OF JEROME FRIEDMAN, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, REF. NO. 1983.29.



CLAUDE MONET, **STACKS OF WHEAT (END OF DAY, AUTUMN)**, 1890–1891, OIL ON CANVAS, 27 7/8 × 39 3/4 IN. (65.8 × 101 CM), MR. AND MRS. LEWIS LARNED COBURN MEMORIAL COLLECTION, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, REF. NO. 1933.444.



CLAUDE MONET, **STACK OF WHEAT (SNOW EFFECT, OVERCAST DAY)**, 1890–1891, OIL ON CANVAS, 26 × 36 5/8 IN. (66 × 93 CM), MR. AND MRS. MARTIN A. RYERSON COLLECTION, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, REF. NO. 1933.1155.



CLAUDE MONET, **STACK OF WHEAT (THAW, SUNSET)**, 1890–1891, OIL ON CANVAS, 25 3/8 × 36 7/16 IN. (64.4 × 92.5 CM), GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. DANIEL C. SEARLE, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, REF. NO. 1983.166.



CLAUDE MONET, **STACKS OF WHEAT (END OF SUMMER)**, 1890–1891, OIL ON CANVAS, 23 5/8 × 39 9/16 IN. (60 × 100.5 CM), GIFT OF ARTHUR M. WOOD, SR. IN MEMORY OF PAULINE PALMER WOOD, ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, REF. NO. 1985.1103.

- Why did you place the paintings in this particular order? Explain your reasoning in the space below.