



What Is Rhetoric?

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Overview

What is rhetoric? The term “rhetoric” is distinct from the term “communication.” Rhetoric is primarily concerned with persuasion, whereas communication is more broadly focused on the sending and receiving of messages. This lesson explores these terms and takes them a step further by asking students to understand and familiarize themselves with specific types of rhetoric. Specifically, this lesson focuses on the differences between the interpersonal (interacting with others) and the intrapersonal (interacting with oneself). Understanding these terms will set the foundation for students to be able to better understand themselves and others when engaging in communication that seeks to persuade oneself or another.



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
- Artwork that depicts a social situation or a person sitting alone
- TED-Ed Video: "How to Use Rhetoric to Get What You Want"

Vocabulary

For multilingual learners, front-load the vocabulary words below. Students will discover the meanings of these terms throughout the lesson.

- **Interpersonal communication:** Acts of communication that occur between 2 or more people
- **Intrapersonal communication:** Acts of communication that occur within oneself

Learning Objectives

- Define the terms "communication" and "rhetoric"
- Understand the differences between intrapersonal rhetoric and interpersonal rhetoric

Warm-Ups

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

Journal Prompt: What is rhetoric? Choose one of the following quotations and explain why you think this most accurately defines rhetoric.

- "The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will." —**Francis Bacon**
- "Rhetoric may then be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever." —**Aristotle**
- "Rhetoric is the art of the good man speaking well." —**Quintillian**
- "[Rhetoric is] the art of moving the soul (psyche) by means of speech." —**Plato**

Discuss your journal entry with a partner. What quotation did you choose? Was it similar or different from your partner's choice? With your partner, compare and contrast the reasons for choosing your quotations, listening carefully to one another's thoughts and reasoning.

DEBRIEF

Why do you think we began today with these quotations? Besides these quotations being about rhetoric, how do these quotations connect with one another? How do these quotations differ from each other?

Define: As a class, come up with a working definition of rhetoric. An example of a working definition is: Rhetoric is using the available means of persuasion to achieve a goal.

Part I: What Is Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Communication?

EXPLORE

To better understand key terms, use the following visual literacy activities to explore communication. Choose a piece of art that depicts a social situation and/or a person sitting by themselves. Project this onto the board or screen.

Some suggestions of artwork include:

- *Nighthawks* by Edward Hopper
- *Waiting* by Edgar Degas
- *The Two Fridas* by Frida Kahlo
- *The Banjo Lesson* by Henry Ossawa Tanner

Silently view the artwork and respond to these questions on your own sheet of paper.

- What is happening in this piece of art? Describe the setting and the person or people depicted.
- Do you think communication is occurring in this piece of art? How do you know? Explain.
- Does the communication look civil? What tells you this?
- What strikes you as interesting about this artwork? Why?
- What questions do you have about the piece of art?

Say: Find a partner and share your responses to the questions posed about the artwork.

DISCUSS

As a whole class, discuss the similarities and differences between partners' responses. Then, explain the terms "**interpersonal communication**" (acts of communication that occur between 2 or more people) and "**intrapersonal communication**" (acts of communication that occur within oneself). If needed, write these on the board or a piece of chart paper for reference.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Ask:

- What kind of communication is occurring in the piece of art we looked at? Interpersonal or intrapersonal?
- When you wrote your thoughts down, what kind of communication was occurring?
- What kind of communication was occurring when you shared your thoughts with a partner?
- Do you think it was helpful to write your thoughts down before speaking with others about the piece of art? Why or why not?

Note: If teaching a class that is shorter than a block period, this is a great place to stop. Be sure to revisit the definitions of interpersonal communication and intrapersonal communication through a review and/or warm-up before jumping into Part II.

Part II: What Is Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Rhetoric?

Say: Now that we better understand interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, we will learn about interpersonal and intrapersonal *rhetoric*.

Remind students of the working definition of rhetoric from the beginning of class. Then, ask students to share their thoughts about the differences between communication and rhetoric. After having 2–3 students share their thoughts, move on to the next activity.

WATCH

As a class or in small groups, have students watch the [TED-Ed video](#) called “How to Use Rhetoric to Get What You Want.” This video helps explain Aristotle's definition of rhetoric.



DISCUSS

After the video, discuss the following questions as a class.

- How does Aristotle's definition of rhetoric compare to the definition we came up with?
- What is deliberative rhetoric, and how is it different from other types of persuasive speech?
- What are logos, pathos, and ethos? How do persuasive appeals help one to engage in deliberative rhetoric?
- How do you think deliberative rhetoric might be helpful when engaging in civil discourse?
- What qualities does deliberative rhetoric have that might help a person engage with ideas across diverse viewpoints?
- After watching this video, what is the difference between communication and rhetoric?

DEBRIEF

After the discussion, highlight the importance of understanding the difference between rhetoric and communication, being sure to connect the term "rhetoric" to "persuasion." Take a moment to revise the class's working definition of rhetoric and write that on the board or a piece of chart paper.

Ask:

- Now that you know the definitions of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication and rhetoric, what do you think the terms "interpersonal rhetoric" and "intrapersonal rhetoric" mean?

DISCUSS

Let students share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Then, have several volunteers share their thoughts with the whole class.

Say: Intrapersonal/interpersonal communication emphasizes how we talk to ourselves and others while intrapersonal/interpersonal rhetoric emphasizes how we persuade ourselves and others. Specifically, intrapersonal rhetoric deals with how we persuade ourselves, and interpersonal rhetoric deals with how we persuade others.

Note: Be sure that students understand the differences between communication and rhetoric as well as the differences between the prefixes intra/inter before moving on to the next lesson.

Closing the Lesson

Project or write the quotations from the beginning of class onto the board.

- “The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will.” —[Francis Bacon](#)
- “Rhetoric may then be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.” —[Aristotle](#)
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Then, ask the following questions of students individually (as an exit ticket) or as a whole class to wrap up the lesson.

- Think back to the quotation you chose at the beginning of the lesson. How has your understanding of it changed or deepened?
- How is communication different from rhetoric? What is the difference between interpersonal and intrapersonal rhetoric?
- How do you think rhetoric (as a whole) 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.