Compelling Question: How can we effectively communicate to promote change?

Supporting Question #1	Supporting Question #2	Supporting Question #3
What is effective communication?	In what ways can we communicate?	How can we harness effective communication to accomplish our goals?

Overview of Inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry is for the students to experiment with using different forms of communication. First, they will explore the key components and potential goals of effective communication. Then, they will reflect on the wide variety of forms of communication that are available to them, as well as the general communication skills they will need in order to use them effectively. Finally, they will practice using a few specific forms of communication, potentially in preparation for the water quality solution plan project that accompanies this curriculum.

To demonstrate their learning, the students will write a short essay about how different communication goals, as well as their own talents and interests, align with different forms of communication. Within the

context of a gallery walk, they will also critique each other's work and revisit their understanding of what effective communication is one last time.

This inquiry is designed for a high school English course and highlights the following standards:

Nebraska High School English Standards

- **LA.10.W.5** Write informative/explanatory pieces to clearly convey ideas, information, and concepts in which the development and structure are appropriate to the task, discipline, purpose, and audience.
- **LA.10.SL.1** Initiate and participate in structured discussions and collaborations about grade-level topics and texts
- **LA.10.SL.2** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly and concisely and in which the organization, development, and style are appropriate to a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

C3 Framework

- **D2.Civ.5.9-12** Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- **D2.Civ.7.9-12** Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.
- **D4.7.9-12** Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

The inquiry is expected to take an estimated **315 minutes** of class time.

Supporting Question #1: What is effective communication?
The students will identify what words and images they associate with the word "communication," and then collaboratively create their own class definition.
The students will learn about the steps of the communication process from a slideshow presentation. Then, they will determine what effective communication looks like by analyzing examples of the communication process being interrupted by various factors.
By analyzing a series of television commercials, the students will explore the potential goals of communication and reflect on how these goals can be accomplished using both words and images.

Supporting Question #2: In what ways can we communicate?
The students will learn a little about what "civic action" is and how different forms of communication can support it. They will also demonstrate the ability to distinguish between the two concepts by categorizing a list that contains both.

The students will learn about and identify examples of three different types of communication - verbal, creative, and digital. They will also practice matching up forms of communication to different types of civic action.

Supporting Question #3: How can we harness effective communication to accomplish our goals?

The students will practice using different types of communication - verbal, creative, and digital - by creating sample versions of a letter, a mural design, and a social media post. They will also critique each other's work and continue to reflect on best practices for communicating.

The students will practice using a form of communication that incorporates all three types of communication - a digital infographic.

Summative Performance Task

The students will write a short essay about how different communication goals, as well as their own talents and interests, align with different forms of communication. They will also reflect on the forms of communication they practiced using during lesson activities.

Taking Informed Action

For their taking informed action activity, the students will take part in a gallery walk and critique each other's work. Afterwards, they will work together to create a general guide for communication that they can reference during future lessons.

Connections to Interdisciplinary Learning Suggestions

Although this inquiry lesson focuses on Nebraska high school English standards, there are several other disciplinary standards that connect to the activities. Whenever possible, a teacher should seek to partner with other teachers to create interdisciplinary units of learning. In the spirit of promoting interdisciplinary learning, this guide provides advice below.

Civics

- By pairing this lesson with other lessons within this curriculum (namely, civics lesson "Democracy in Action"), the students could learn about communicating and promoting change in their own communities at the same time. In other words, instead of simply learning how to communicate, the students could learn how to communicate for the purpose of promoting change. This could be accomplished by substituting in prompts themed to civic action or the water quality solution plan project. Taking a community problem-solving approach to this lesson would allow you to meet several C3 framework standards for civics.

- Many of the activities in this lesson involve the students reaching conclusions as a group (e.g. creating lists, guides, and definitions as a whole class rather than individually). These activities help fulfill civics standard **SS HS.1.2.c** ("Engage and reflect on participation in civic activities).

Fine Arts

- Many of the activities in this lesson involve either analyzing or creating art as a form of communication. It would thus be possible to incorporate fine arts standard **FA12.2.1** into this lesson ("Students will use the creative process to formulate a plan and implement aesthetic choices in artwork").

- Two types of communication that the students explore in this lesson are "creative" and "visual" communication. Most forms of art, including visual art, music, dance, poetry, and fictional prose, would fall into this category, so any fine arts standards related to these types of communication could be made relevant to this lesson.

- Digital communication is another type of communication that the students explore in this lesson. This could be tied directly to fine arts standard **FA12.1.2.b** ("Refine and enhance expression through media arts, ideas, and skills over time while gathering and responding to critical feedback").

- Audience behavior is addressed in the first section of this lesson. This could connect easily to fine arts standard **FA12.5.3.a** ("Evaluate how audience conduct affects a theatrical performance").

In General

- Many of the activities in this lesson are designed to help students practice various communication formats and skills. *What* they communicate in these activities could be changed to fit almost any class, allowing you to easily collaborate with other teachers. For example, if your students were doing a research project about the French Revolution in history class, they could use different forms of communication to share information about the major historical figures involved in that event. At the same time, you could extend some activities to allow them to be submitted for a grade in another class. For example, rather than having the students spend 10 minutes sketching a mural in English class, they could spend an hour (potentially spread across both English and art classes) actually painting one. Similarly, rather than spending 10 minutes writing a short letter to the principal about potential changes to how the school functions, the students could spend a week or two writing a speech in both English and speech class. The possibilities are seemingly endless.

Staging the Compelling Question (15-20 minutes)

In this activity, the students will begin to explore different forms of communication.

First, give the students a generic prompt to write about, such as one of the following:

- ***Write about one fun thing you did this past summer.***
- ***What is your biggest pet peeve?***
- ***What is your favorite restaurant, and why?***

- *What do you do to relax?*
- *Write about your best birthday ever.*

Give the students just a couple of minutes to respond. Then, split the class into small groups, and randomly assign one of the following forms of communication to each group:

- Poster/flyer
- Drawing
- News report
- Song
- Poem
- Letter
- Skit
- Magazine article

Each group must communicate their responses to the writing prompt using their randomly chosen form of communication. The students will have only five minutes to create their presentation, and it should convey all of the group members' responses to the writing prompt.

After all of the students have presented, spend a few minutes discussing the many different ways that people communicate messages to audiences. Then, pose the following question to the class:

> *Not all forms of communication are written, but they all involve writing. How might writing play a role in each of the following forms of communication?*
>
> - *Visual art (a painting, a drawing, etc.)*
> - *A song*
> - *A documentary*
> - *A play*

Throughout this lesson, continually remind your students that reading and writing support every form of communication. If your students will be completing the water quality solution plan project, their project may end up taking a more visual/oral form, but they should understand from the beginning that no matter what form of communication they choose to use, writing will be involved.

Additional tips to consider:

- Rather than assigning forms of communication to the students, you could also have each student choose which one they wanted to use, and then create groups based on what they chose. Then, afterwards, you could have the students reflect on why they chose what they chose.

Supporting Question #1 (100 minutes)

Supporting Question and Featured Sources

The first supporting question asks, *"What is effective communication?"* In answering this question, the students will first craft their own class definition of communication based on the words and images they

associate it with. Then, they will explore the "dos and don'ts" of communication by strategically observing different forms of communication in various settings throughout their own school. Finally, by analyzing a series of television commercials, the students will explore the potential goals of communication and reflect on how these goals can be accomplished using both words and images.

In figuring out what effective communication looks like, the students will address the first half of the compelling question. Armed with general knowledge of how and why we use communication skills, the students will be ready to experiment with different types and specific forms of communication later on in the lesson.

Formative Performance Tasks

Defining Communication - Word Association

In this activity, the students will work together to define the term "communication."

First, give the students a few minutes to respond to the following prompts:

- ***What words come to mind when you hear the word "communication?" Write down at least 10.***
- ***What images come to mind when you hear the word "communication?" Draw at least 7.***

Afterwards, have the students turn to a nearby classmate and share what they came up with. Then, bring the students together for a whole class discussion, during which they should create a single class definition of "communication." You may also choose to have the students compare their own definition to definitions created by other groups (i.e. online dictionaries, universities, etc.). The point of this activity is simply for the students to identify the core components of what it means to communicate.

Communication Investigation

In this activity, the students will explore effective communication by observing it in the world around them. Before completing this activity, consider giving a short presentation on the communication cycle (consider using slides 1-3 of this slideshow).

To begin this activity, explain to the students that they will be taking on the role of investigators in order to learn more about communication within their own school. Because different school settings will yield different results, the class will need to split up to "cover more ground." Split the students into groups and assign each group to one of the following settings:

- An occupied classroom (in which a teacher is working with a class of students)
- An unoccupied classroom (in which there are no students)
- The hallways
- The school office

You will probably need to make arrangements with other teachers/staff in order for the students to observe some of these settings during class time. The goal of this activity is simply for the students to study different forms of communication within their school, so feel free to create your own list of settings to match your situation.

Send the groups to their assigned settings armed with this handout; they should fill it out based on what they observe.

Afterwards, the students will come together as a class to share their findings. You may guide their discussion using the following prompts:

- *What different forms of communication did we observe?*
- *Based on what we observed, what are some examples of effective communication? What about ineffective communication?*

During their discussion, the students should work together to create a list of "dos and don'ts" for communication. Later on in this lesson (during the taking informed action activity), they will revisit and add onto this list, so consider displaying it somewhere in the classroom.

Goals and Strategies - Commercial Surfing

In this activity, the students will practice identifying the goals of communication by analyzing a series of television commercials.

First, the students will have a brief discussion based on the following prompt:

> *For what different purposes do we communicate? What are the potential goals of communication?*

Write down the goals that the students come up with on the board (and don't erase them; these goals will be referenced during the next part of the activity). The students' list might contain items such as the following:

- To inform
- To instruct
- To persuade
- To inspire
- To entertain
- To change attitude/behavior
- To share an emotion

Next, split the class into six small groups and create six "stations" throughout the room for the groups to rotate through. Place a digital device at each station displaying one of the following video clips:

- Be All You Can Be - US Army
- The Little Duck - Disneyland Paris
- I Sawed This Boat in Half - FLEX Tape
- How Many Days 'Til They Change Their Ways - Jack in the Box
- Little Piggy - Geico
- Maddie - Chevy

All of these clips are TV commercials. For each clip, the students will need to respond to the following prompts:

- *What was the main message of this commercial?*

- *What might have been the intended audience for this commercial?*
- *Which communication goals did this commercial try to achieve (e.g. inform, persuade, etc.)?*
- *What strategies did the creators of this commercial use to accomplish their communication goals (consider words, images, etc.)?*

Have the students record their answers for each station on a single sheet of paper, labeled with the corresponding station number. Afterwards, the students will discuss their answers as a class, using the activity prompts to guide the discussion. In addition, if time allows, you may have the students discuss and vote on which commercial displayed the most effective communication (this would give the students a chance to review what they learned in the previous activity, as well as potentially increase engagement).

Finally, if your students will be completing the year-long water quality project that accompanies this curriculum, spend a few minutes talking about how they will eventually need to use their developing communication skills to accomplish goals like spreading awareness and inspiring action.

Additional tips to consider:

- As an extension of the "Communication Investigation" activity, consider having the students continue their investigation of communication outside of class time. For example, you might have them record the communication they observe throughout the rest of the school day (rather than just during your class). Communication during passing periods might be a particularly interesting topic of discussion for your students. You could even have them keep a "communication investigation journal" at home for a day or two.

- To simplify/shorten the "Communication Investigation" activity, you could take your class on a walk around the school, during which they would write down any forms of communication they observed. Keep in mind, however, that this might limit the number of different forms they would be able to witness.

- If the "Communication Investigation" activity does not suit the needs of your students and/or the constraints of your situation, or if you simply want to expand on the concept of effective communication, consider using this alternative activity. This activity also offers opportunities for you to collaborate interdisciplinarily with a speech teacher.

- When discussing ineffective communication, be sure to take this opportunity to talk to your students about your expectations for audience member behavior during presentations. Both the "sender" and the "receiver" play active roles in the communication process.

- For the "Goals and Strategies" activity, any set of commercials will do, so long as they demonstrate a variety of communication goals and strategies. Consider substituting the provided commercials with ones that will personally connect with your students. You may also be able to relate this activity to what the students are learning about in a history class by choosing commercials from specific time periods. Finally, to give this activity a different flavor, you may choose to use PSAs instead of standard commercials.

Supporting Question #2 (60 minutes)

Supporting Question and Featured Sources

The second supporting question asks, *"In what ways can we communicate?"* In answering this question, the students will first identify the overarching communication skills that make all specific forms of communication possible. Then, they will practice distinguishing between and evaluating different forms of communication by searching for prime examples of specific forms of communication online. Finally, the students will participate in a "round robin" style activity in which they will have the chance to practice and critique a number of different basic communication skills (e.g. written, oral, visual, creative, digital, etc.).

In answering this question, the students will become aware of the plethora of options they have when it comes to communicating. They will also discover that different forms of communication align with different goals and skills.

Formative Performance Tasks

Discovering Forms of Communication

In this activity, the students will begin to explore the many forms of communication available to them, as well as identify the skills they will need to develop before they can use these forms effectively.

First, the students will play a game in which they will need to connect general communication skills to specific forms of communication. Split the class into small teams, and give each team a piece of paper. At the beginning of each round, you will say a type of communication out loud (e.g. written, oral, visual, creative, digital, etc.). Then, the groups will race each other to create the longest list of forms of communication that fit that description. For example, a list of written forms of communication might include a letter, a newspaper article, a short story, a poem, and a newsletter. After 2 minutes, the group with the longest list (after it is checked over by you) wins that round. Whether or not a form of communication falls into the given category is up to your discretion, but keep in mind that the categories can overlap. For example, a poem could be considered both written and creative, because in order to write an effective poem, you need to have both creativity and developed writing skills. Similarly, an infographic could be considered written, visual, and creative (and, if it was created or shared on a digital device, it could be considered digital, as well). The goal of this activity is not for the students to separate different forms of communication into rigid categories, but rather to brainstorm different forms of communication and reflect on what kinds of skills these forms require. At the end of the game, explain to the students that there are many different forms of communication that they can use to send messages, but they all involve some combination of the same set of communication skills.

Next, give the students access to this list of different forms of communication. Start by pointing out some of the forms the students didn't mention during the game, then ask them to discuss the following prompt with a partner:

> *Which of these forms of communication would you be most comfortable using, and why?*

You may choose to have a handful of students share their responses with the class.

The Hunt for Exemplars - Forms of Communication

In this activity, the students will search for and evaluate examples of a specific form of communication.

To begin this activity, split the class into small groups. Then, assign one of the forms of communication on this list to each group (keeping in mind that the students will be searching for examples of these forms of communication online). First, each group will need to find three examples of their assigned form of communication. Then, they will evaluate the examples they found by filling out this handout.

Finally, they will need to select one example to share with the class. If the example they chose to share exceeds ten minutes, they can simply share a ten-minute excerpt from it. As each group presents their example, the rest of the class should answer the following questions (also found in this printable handout):

- *What communication skills were needed to create this example of communication?*
- *For what purposes was this example of communication created?*
- *Who were the intended "receivers" (audience) of this example of communication?*
- *How effective was this example of communication?*

After all of the groups have presented, have a whole class discussion based on the following prompts:

- *How effective was each of these examples of communication?*
- *Recall that we use communication to achieve a variety of goals. For each of these forms of communication, what purposes are we most likely to use them for?*
- *The examples you just shared were intended for different "receivers" (audiences). Are some forms of communication more likely to reach certain audiences than others? Explain, and give examples.*

Afterwards, you may also choose to have the students vote on which example they liked the best (or thought was the most effective).

Try It Out - Forms of Communication

In this activity, the students will practice using a variety of different communication skills.

To begin, create six "stations" throughout the classroom and split the class into six groups. The students will rotate through the stations, completing different activities at each station. Two of these stations will focus on written communication, two will focus on creative communication, and the final two will focus on digital communication. Please note that the activities at both of the related stations will be the same (i.e. the two written communication stations will be identical, as will the other two sets of stations, so the students technically only have to visit three stations in order to complete all of the available activities). Below is a list of the supplies you'll need for each station:

- Stations 1 and 4 (written communication):
    - Blank sheets of paper
    - Pens/pencils
    - The prompt: "Write a short letter to either the principal or a student organization (e.g. the school newspaper, student council, etc.) proposing a change you would like to see in how the school functions."

- Stations 2 and 5 (creative communication):
    - Blank half sheets of paper
    - Pens/pencils
    - Crayons/markers

    - The prompt: “You have been asked to paint a mural on one of the exterior walls of the school that visually represents the school’s strengths, values, and mottos. On a half sheet of paper, sketch your design idea for the mural.”

- Stations 3 and 6 (digital communication):
    - Blank sheets of paper
    - Pens/pencils
    - Crayons/markers
    - The prompt: “One of the teams/clubs at your school hasn’t been getting much attention lately, and you want to help raise awareness about it. You have already gotten permission from the principal to post about some of the team/club’s recent projects and accomplishments on the school’s social media pages. On a sheet of paper, plan what you’d like your first post to look like (you can choose whichever social media outlet you like best, or even make up a new one). Sketch what the post would look like, including both the written message and any pictures/videos/other attachments you would include.”

Give the students 10-15 minutes at each station. They should NOT take what they create with them to the next station; instruct them to leave their letters/murals/social media posts behind when it’s time to move on. Then, after three rotations (the students should have completed all three available activities at this point), distribute six sticky notes to each student and introduce the following set of instructions:

“As you rotate through the last three stations, instead of completing the activity, you will use your sticky notes to comment on what your classmates have made. Be sure to stick your comments to the work that you are directly referring to. Write one positive and one constructive comment at each station (you cannot write two comments about the same piece of work).”

Give the students 3-5 minutes at each station. Finally, after three more rotations, lead the class in analyzing both their work and their comments. Your goal for this discussion should be to identify the factors that equate to effective communication in different forms. In other words, have the students reflect on what they did right and what they could have done better in terms of communication.

Additional tips to consider:

- To adjust the length of the “Hunt for Exemplars” activity (or to provide scaffolding for your students), you can change the size of the groups, the number of examples each group has to find, and/or the length of the students’ presentations. You could also change the structure of the activity more substantially by providing the students with examples for them to evaluate (rather than having them find their own).

Supporting Question #3 (135 minutes)

Supporting Question and Featured Sources

The third supporting question asks, *“How can we harness effective communication to accomplish our goals?”* In answering this question, the students will practice using communication skills in context by taking a deeper dive into one specific form of communication.

In answering this question, the students will be answering the overarching compelling question through trial and error. They will also have a chance to explore what effective communication means for them personally, based on their own interests and talents.

Formative Performance Tasks

Forms of Communication Project

In this activity, the students will take a deeper dive into a specific form of communication.

For this activity, the students may work alone or in small groups. To begin, give the students access to the list of forms of communication used in previous activities. Each student/group will choose one of these forms and use it to communicate the information found on one of the following webpages:

- The Ogallala Aquifer
- Secondary Aquifers in Nebraska
- Curb Strip Gardens

On the forms of communication list, the students will find linked guides created by the organization BeACitizen. Give them some time to read through the guide that corresponds to the form of communication they chose, as well as to research some examples online.

Then, give the students time in class to work on their projects. As they work, check in with each student/group regularly to gauge their progress. Also, be sure to clarify that they do not have to do any outside research to complete this assignment; the information provided by their webpage is all they should need.

After all of the students/groups have finished their projects, simply collect them. The students will have a chance to reflect on their own work and explore what their classmates have created during the summative and taking informed action activities.

Additional tips to consider:

- The "Forms of Communication Project" can be reformatted in a number of ways to suit your students and situation. For example, you may want to limit which forms of communication the students are allowed to choose. Some of the options on the list may be too complicated or difficult for your students to complete in the amount of time you have to dedicate to the project. If your students are simultaneously completing a project for another class, you may be able to collaborate with the teacher and combine the two projects. You could even choose to teach the third section of this lesson plan multiple times, allowing the students to study more than one form of communication in more depth. If you chose to take this route, you could either allow the students to choose three different forms of communication, or you could choose the forms for them (if you wanted to ensure that they practiced using a variety of different communication skills). In addition, the more projects the students complete, the more projects they will have to analyze during the taking informed action activity (a gallery walk).

- Feel free to find your own webpages to supplement or replace the provided suggestions. Consider how the topic(s) you choose could connect to the students' other classes.

Summative Performance Task

As a summative assessment, the students will reflect on their forms of communication project, as well as the general communication skills they practiced using throughout the lesson. The students will write a short essay based on the following prompts:

- *Of all the forms of communication you practiced using in this lesson, which was your favorite, and why?*
- *How do different communication skills (written, oral, visual, creative, and digital) match up to your own talents and interests? Which types of communication do you think come most naturally to you?*
- *Look back at our class list of forms of communication and choose three that you would be most excited about using in the future (you cannot choose any of the forms that we practiced in class). Briefly explain why you chose those three.*
- *In creating your forms of communication project, what challenges did you face, and what lessons did you learn?*

For more information about using essays as summative assessments, see this guide.

Taking Informed Action

The taking informed action activity for this lesson will be a gallery walk of the students' projects. If the students completed the project more than once, you can either include all of the students' work in your gallery walk or ask them which project they want to contribute to the gallery. Your "gallery" can be physical or digital, but either way, be sure to attach the students' names to their work.

As the students explore the gallery, they can take on the role of "communication critics" by filling out this handout. Randomly assign one or two projects to each student to offer in-depth feedback on (see questions 2-3). Following the activity, consider allowing the students to read the comments that their classmates made about their own projects. In addition, the students will each choose the projects that they feel best demonstrated written and visual communication, respectively, as well as which project demonstrated the best communication overall. Consider tallying up the students' "votes" and declaring "winners."

Finally, in light of the projects they just created, the students will come together as a class to revisit their understanding of what effective communication is. By analyzing each other's work, they should create a list of tips and tricks to remember whenever they are trying to communicate something. Consider displaying this list somewhere that the students can reference it throughout the rest of the year.

Citations

The-communication-cycle

15-bad-speeches-avoid-in-presentations

fix-leak-week