

Thinking Through Craft
Successful Communication





Successful Communication

Unit Overview

Grades

Primary–Middle School

Unit Goal

This unit helps students analyze and understand the features of successful communication, with a specific focus on written communication. The overarching goals are to engage in meta-cognition to understand features of successful communication including ideas, organization, sentence fluency, voice, word choice, and conventions. Using the artwork exemplar below also supports conversation about propaganda and/or stereotyping, content not explicitly addressed in this unit.

Alternative approaches are offered for primary and middle school students.

Curricular Connections

Whether reading, listening, writing, or speaking successful communication allows thoughts and ideas expressed by one person to be easily understood by another. Facility with language is essential for understanding and conveying ideas in any content area.

Essential Questions

- What *is* communication?
- What are the features of successful communication?
- What can artworks teach us about successful communication?
- How can students understand the features of successful communication so well that they use these tools independently and flexibly?

Duration

This unit is composed of three sets of activities and requires a total of 125 minutes across three class periods. Optional metacognitive breaks are not included in this estimate. These breaks provide students an opportunity to reflect upon their thinking (metacognition) in order to better understand that thinking pattern and transfer it to other content areas and to the world outside of school.

Artworks

This guide focuses on Wendy Maruyama's *Shadow of Amboseli*, an example of advocacy art. Several alternative artworks from the Renwick Gallery can be used to support this unit, including:

- *Washington, D.C. Foreclosure Quilt* by Kathryn Clark
- *The Craftsman Series: Shovels* by Stacey Lee Webber
- *MMIW* by Katrina Mitten

Arc of Learning

Set 1 + What Is Communication? What Makes Communication Successful? (50 minutes)

Using examples of individuals who communicated successfully throughout modern history, students will come up with a definition of communication. They will compare this with a dictionary definition.

Students will consider the features of successful communication by reflecting on their own experiences. They will use this experience to list strategies that can be used to communicate with clarity.

Student responses will be organized under the following features of successful communication and be labeled accordingly. Student responses will then be used to describe each category

- Ideas
- Organization
- Sentence Fluency
- Voice
- Word Choice
- Conventions

Set 2 + What Can Artworks Teach Us about Communication? (35 minutes)

Students will use look a close looking strategy to examine an artwork.

→ **Primary School** will use *Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs* to look at the artwork.

→ **Middle School** will use the thinking routine *See-Think-Wonder* to explore and think about the artwork.

Using a variety of thinking routines, students will analyze and interpret an artwork. They will build background knowledge of the artwork's larger historical context, provided in a short article. To deepen their understanding of the features of successful communication, students will explore the artwork through the lens of each of the features.

Set 3 + How Can Students Use the Features of Successful Communication Independently and Flexibly? (40 minutes)

Students will create a descriptive piece of writing. They will first draw their ideas and then use the details in their drawing to describe it. They will then use all the features of successful communications

Primary School

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1.A & B
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2.B, D, E
CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.A - E

Middle School

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.A & B
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.B - D
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A - E

High School

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1.C
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.A - F
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.A, D, E





Successful Communication

Student Edition

Essential Questions

- What *is* communication?
- What are the features of successful communication?
- What can artworks teach us about successful communication?
- How can students understand the features of successful communication so well that they use these tools independently and flexibly?



Wendy Maruyama, *Shadow of Amboseli*, 2016

Jelutong, milk paint, waxed linen thread, and finish, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Penland School of Crafts through contributions made by Fleur Bresler, the Cousins Foundation, Tom Oreck, Kaola and Frank Phoenix, Susan Parker Martin and Alan Belzer, Barbara McFadyen and Douglass Phillips, Diane Charno Lee Rocamora, John A. Thompson Jr., members of the Smithsonian Women's Committee, and the Collectors of Wood Art



Set 1 ✦ What Is Communication? What Makes Communication Successful?

A. What is it to communicate?

In the space below, write as many synonyms for 'to communicate' as you can.

B: What are the features of successful communication?

Think about the synonyms that you listed above. What picture might you draw to represent communication?



To communicate is to transmit information, thoughts, or feelings so that it is satisfactorily received or understood. It is to get someone to understand your thoughts or feelings.
 –Merriam Webster

C. What does successful communication feel and sound like?

Think of a time when you communicated successfully or when someone was successful in communicating with you.

OR

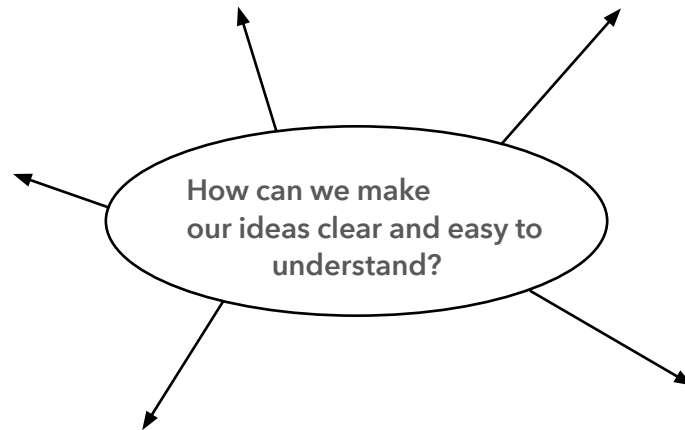
Think of a time when you did not communicate successfully or someone was not successful in communicating with you.

What did it feel like?	What did it sound like?	What happened as a result of the communication?



D. Revisit: What are the features of successful communication?

1. Working in a small group, review your responses from **Page 7** together. Then discuss:
 - What allowed the communication to be so successful?
 - What did you or the person communicating with you do in order to communicate successfully? OR What should the person who did not communicate successfully have done in order for the communication to be successful?
2. Next, answer the question below as a web, drawing lines between similar ideas.



3. Share your responses with another group. Are there common features? What features mentioned by the other group would you add to your web?



Set 2 + What Can Artworks Teach Us about Successful Communication?

A. Close Looking: PRIMARY SCHOOL

What can we learn about communication from this artwork? Look at it closely.

Next, write as many nouns, adjectives and verbs as you can to describe it and its parts.

NOUNS	ADJECTIVES	VERBS
elephant	hairy	sleeping

What are you wondering about? Do you have any questions?.



Set 2 † What Can Artworks Teach Us about Successful Communication?

A. Close Looking: MIDDLE SCHOOL

What can we learn about successful communication from artworks?

Let's take a long and close look at this artwork.

Next, fill the columns below with as many observations, ideas, and questions about the artwork as you can.



SEE What do you see?	THINK Based on what you see, what do you think is going on?	WONDER What do you wonder? What questions do you have?
pieces of wood, string		



Optional: Metacognitive Break PRIMARY SCHOOL

Reflect on Nouns, Adjectives, Verbs ...

How did using that thinking pattern help you observe the artwork?

In what other situations might you find Nouns, Adjectives, Verbs useful?



Optional: Metacognitive Break MIDDLE SCHOOL

Reflect on See-Think-Wonder...

What actions did this pattern of thinking require you to take? (What did you do first and then next etc.?)

What is the value of using See-Think-Wonder?

In what other situations might you find See-Think-Wonder useful?



B. What is the artwork about?

Now that you have looked closely at the artwork, how might you interpret it? Make a claim, support it with evidence, and pose a question in the spaces below.

CLAIM Make a claim about your interpretation of the artwork. What meaning does it hold for you? What message does the artwork convey to you?	SUPPORT What do you see that supports the claim you make?	QUESTION What's left hanging? What isn't explained? What new questions does your claim raise?



Optional: Metacognitive Break

Reflect on Claim-Support-Question ...

What kind of thinking did you find yourself engaged with?

What is the relationship between making a claim and providing evidence to support that claim?

How might this pattern of thinking be helpful in successful communication?"



B. What is the story of the artwork?

This artwork is called *Shadow of Amboseli*. It was created by Wendy Maruyama in 2016.

Wendy Maruyama was born in Colorado in 1952. Her farming family moved around California when she was a child. They eventually settled in Chula Vista, where there weren't many other Japanese Americans like her. She did feel deep connections to her nearby aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Maruyama, who is deaf and has cerebral palsy, attended a public elementary school that had a strong speech and hearing program. Maruyama excelled in art classes. She enjoyed making 3D art and crafts throughout her life—like ceramics in high school and metalworking in college.

Maruyama became interested in furniture making. She liked how form and function could work together. Through graduate school then fellowships and teaching, Maruyama followed her curiosity. She explains: "The series is important to me because it helps me to focus on a line of work without wandering too far... it's always a result of something happening with some experience that I have had that allows me to create a theme from these series."¹

The Shadow of Amboseli is part of a group of works Maruyama made after a trip to Kenya. In the Amboseli National Park she saw elephants and other large animals. She also met with experts who told her about the effects of the illegal ivory trade: people kill, or poach, elephants for their tusks. They sell the ivory, which is sometimes turned into sculptures or jewelry.

Poaching has a big impact. The Great Elephant Census of 2016 showed that the elephant population in Africa had dropped by 30 percent!² "These animals have been roaming the earth for millions of years and are on the brink of extinction because of mankind. That is just unacceptable to me," said Maruyama. "Since these animals are half a world away, it's easy for some to turn a blind eye but I just couldn't let it go."³

Maruyama made a series of 8- to 12- foot tall masks and other objects. She called this the wildLIFE Project.⁴ After 40 years of making furniture, she used her knowledge and problem-solving skills to make a statement about saving elephants.

"All my life I've loved animals... I knew I wanted to make a full-sized elephant but I knew that if I made it normal way out of wood, it would be really heavy and hard to move. I came up with the idea of cutting the wood into very thin pieces and then sewing them together to create the three-dimensional quality of the animal. The knots that are holding the elephant together became a metaphor for trying to fix the problem of poaching. That's one of the beauties of craft, actually: the balance between the message and the material."⁵

1 <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-wendy-maruyama-15790#transcript>

2 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/wildlife-african-elephants-population-decrease-great-elephant-census>

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4q3epzjj3E>

4 <https://penland.org/gallery/2016-exhibition-wendy-maruyama-wildlife-project/>

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jF6lJNx5NRA>



<p>CONNECT</p> <p>How does your interpretation of the artwork <i>connect</i> to ideas in the text?</p>	<p>EXTEND</p> <p>How did the text <i>extend</i> your understanding? What new knowledge did you gain?</p>	<p>WONDER</p> <p>Are you left with any new <i>wonderings</i>/questions?</p>



Optional: Metacognitive Break

Reflect on Connect-Extend-Wonder ...

What did you do first? What was the next step?

What did you discover about building new information on top of prior knowledge?

Why might it be important to continue asking questions?

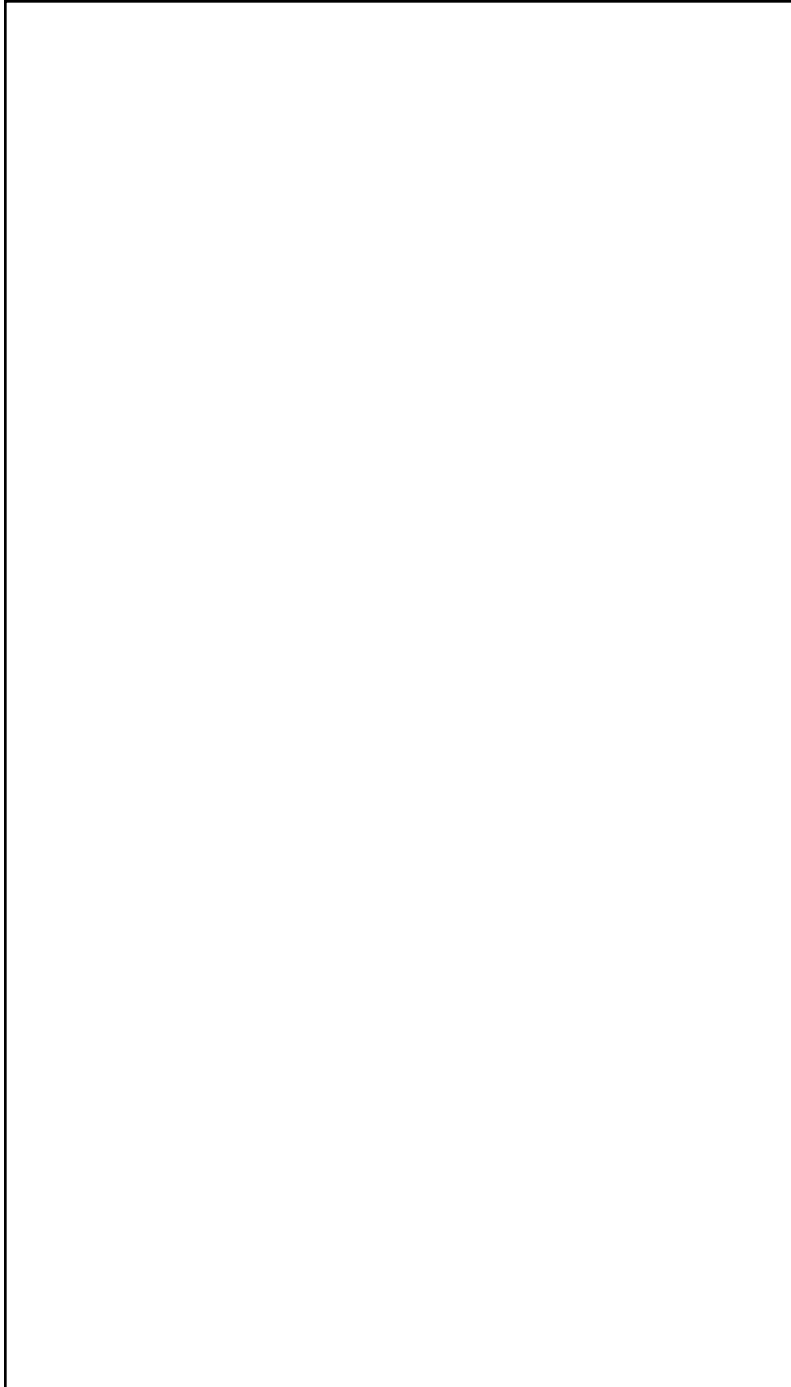
On what other occasions might you find it useful to use Connect-Extend-Wonder?



Set 3 † How Can Students Use the Features of Successful Communication Independently and Flexibly?

A. Connecting art and writing

Draw: Take 2-3 minutes to create a line drawing of the artwork. Include as many details as you can. Write them in the graphic below.



Connect: The artist successfully communicated a big idea without using words. How might you connect the parts of the artwork with the features of successful communication? Make notes in the space below.

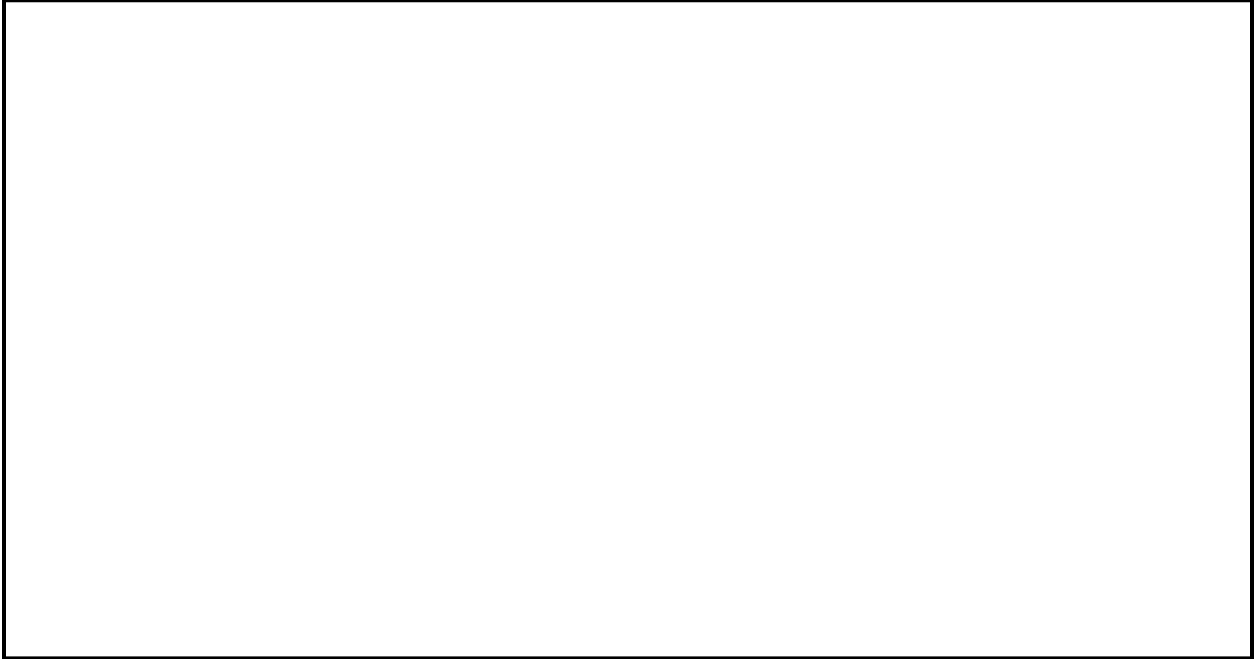
<p>IDEAS What details do you see that describe, support, or add context</p>	
<p>ORGANIZATION Where do you notice the artist's attempts to organize her ideas?</p>	
<p>SENTENCE FLUENCY What strategy has the artist used to make certain that she leaves no gaps in what she is trying to communicate?</p>	
<p>VOICE What evidence do you see that the artist feels very strongly about the subject?</p>	
<p>WORD CHOICE The artist doesn't use words. How does the artist say what she wants visually?</p>	
<p>CONVENTIONS Where do you notice the artist's skill?</p>	



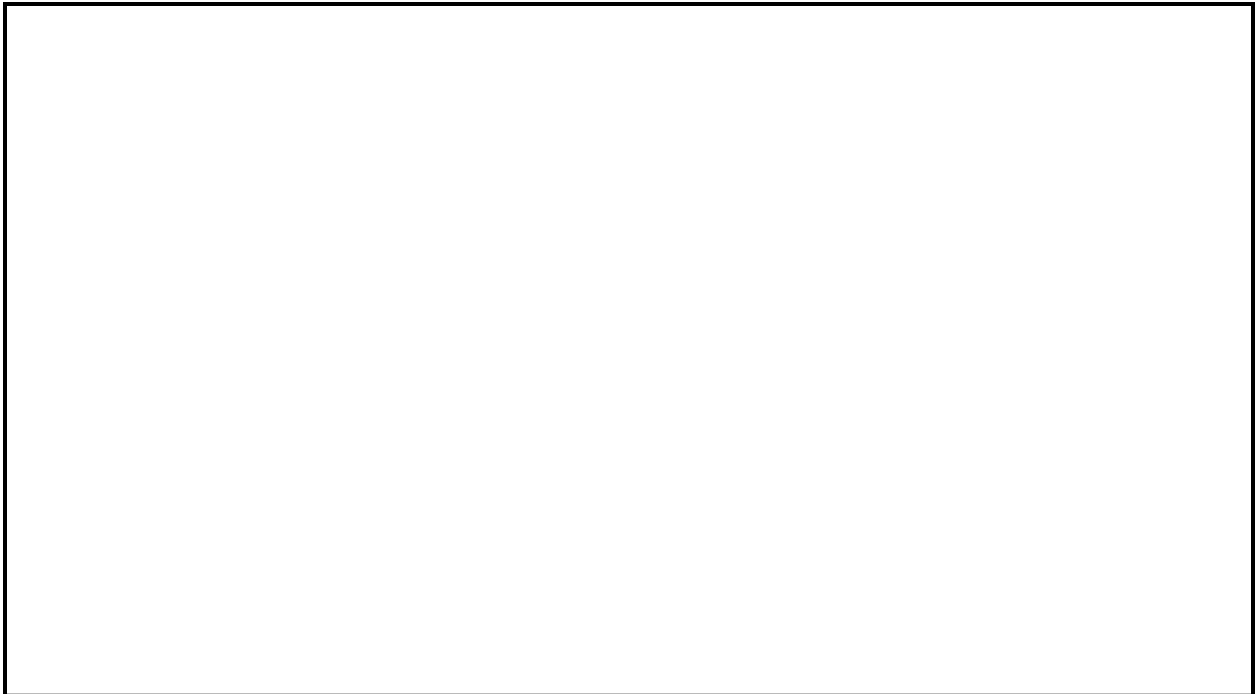
B. Using the features of a successful communication

Step 1: Build a visual story

The artwork depicts a frozen moment. Draw a picture of what happened just before.



Now, draw a detailed picture of what happens next. What future does the artist want you to imagine?



Now, turn the page to write the story of before and after, using the features of successful communication.



B. Using the features of a successful communication

Step 2: Communicating that story successfully

Write the story of before and after the moment captured by the artist. Use the features of successful communication.

<p>Be sure to use all the features of successful communication!!</p> <p>IDEAS Ideas are built with plenty of supportive, contextual, and descriptive details.</p> <p>ORGANIZATION Ideas are organized logically. There is a beginning, body, and conclusion. Ideas are organized into paragraphs with focused topic sentences.</p> <p>SENTENCE FLUENCY Sentences are interesting and varied. They are composed thoughtfully to in order to communicate successfully. There are no gaps in the thought process. The thoughts flow smoothly and are easy to follow.</p> <p>VOICE The communicator is passionate and speaks from the heart. It is abundantly evident that the communicator is knowledgeable and has a message to convey.</p> <p>WORD CHOICE The communicator picks choice words to say convey precise meaning and to help the audience form pictures in their mind Figurative language is used to communicate thoughts effectively.</p> <p>CONVENTIONS Grammar, spelling, punctuation are all correct.</p>	
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