Beyond Words

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."
— Ludwig Wittgenstein

Warm up

- If you could only use one emoji for the rest of your life, which would you choose and why?
- What are some of the most recognisable logos, symbols, or signs in the world? Why do people remember them so easily?
- If all written language disappeared tomorrow, what would be the biggest problem?
- Which would be harder: explaining love using only pictures or explaining it using only words? Why?
- Can two people look at the same image and understand it differently? Give an example.

1. Work in pairs or small groups to complete the challenge below.

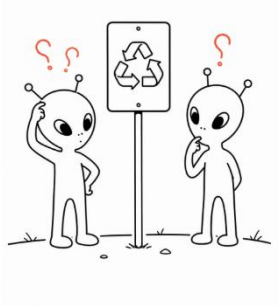
Imagine aliens arrive on Earth and do not understand any human language.

Choose **three** of the ideas below and create simple drawings or symbols to communicate them.

Do not use words, letters, or numbers

food	danger	friendship	love	earth
family	happiness	music	freedom	technology

When you have finished, exchange your drawings with another pair or group. Can they correctly identify the meaning of each symbol?



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2. Work with a partner to explore how people interpret symbols.

1. Write down the first meaning that comes to mind.
2. Compare your answers with your partner.
3. Decide whether each symbol is mostly universal or mostly cultural. Your teacher will discuss the answers with the class.

	Symbol	What does it mean to you?	Mostly Universal	Mostly Cultural
a.		*love, romance, affection, family*	☐	☐
b.			☐	☐
c.			☐	☐
d.			☐	☐
e.			☐	☐
f.			☐	☐
g.			☐	☐
h.			☐	☐
i.			☐	☐
j.			☐	☐
k.			☐	☐
l.			☐	☐
m.			☐	☐
n.			☐	☐
o.			☐	☐
p.			☐	☐
q.			☐	☐
r.			☐	☐

- Were you surprised by any of your partner's answers? Explain.
- Did any symbol have more than one possible meaning?
- Which symbol do you think an alien would find most confusing?
- Which symbols do you think people will still understand in 500 years?
- Is it possible for a symbol to be truly universal? Why or why not?

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3. Match the words about meaning and interpretation to their definitions.

a.	evoke *6*	1.	to exchange or share information
b.	trigger *2*	2.	to cause a reaction
c.	imply *4*	3.	to connect one thing with another
d.	communicate *1*	4.	to suggest something without saying it directly
e.	associate *3*	5.	to express or make an idea, feeling, or meaning understood
f.	convey *5*	6.	to make someone remember or feel something

4. Choose the correct answer.

a. Many people …… a dove with peace and freedom.

1. communicate 2. *associate* 3. convey

b. Road signs are designed to …… with drivers quickly and clearly.

1. evoke 2. trigger 3. *communicate*

c. His silence seemed to …… that he disagreed.

1. trigger 2. associate 3. *imply*

d. Works of art often …… feelings such as joy, sadness or nostalgia.

1. communicate 2. *evoke* 3. associate

e. Certain smells, sounds, or images can …… memories from the past.

1. *trigger* 2. convey 3. imply

f. Advertisements are often designed to …… a message about a product.

1. trigger 2. *convey* 3. imply

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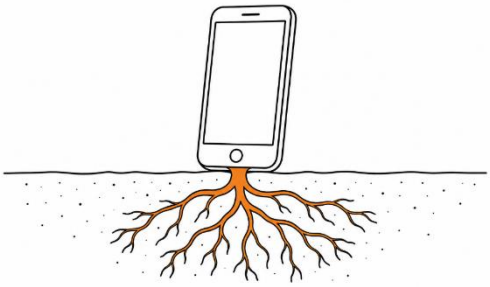
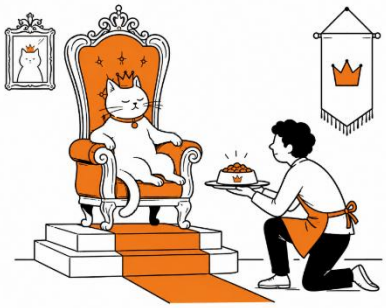
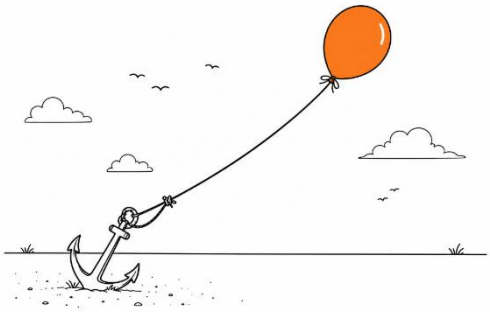
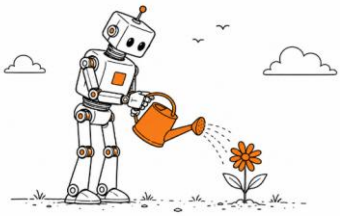
5. Work with a partner. Discuss the images below. What ideas, emotions, or messages do they communicate? Use the vocabulary from exercises 3 and 4.

Teacher's note: Suggested ideas have been added below each image for you in case students need some inspiration or the discussion needs a little support.

<table>
<tr><td> </td><td>  </td></tr>
<tr><td>a. Freedom, captivity, choice</td><td>b. Technology, connection, dependence</td></tr>
<tr><td>  </td><td> </td></tr>
<tr><td>c. Power, status, luxury</td><td>d. Letting go, moving on, change</td></tr>
<tr><td>  </td><td> </td></tr>
<tr><td>e. Hope, dreams, optimism</td><td>f. Home, adventure, uncertainty</td></tr>
<tr><td> </td><td>  </td></tr>
<tr><td>g. Leadership, influence, standing out</td><td>h. Artificial intelligence, kindness, future</td></tr>
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- Which image was the hardest to interpret? Why?
- Did you disagree about any image? Explain.
- Can pictures communicate ideas better than words? Give an example.

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6. You are going to watch a TED Talk. Match the vocabulary from the video to its meaning.

a.	decipher *6*	1.	The empty area around or between objects in an image.
b.	abstraction *2*	2.	The process of reducing something to its most basic form or essential features.
c.	negative space *1*	3.	Difficult to understand, recognise.
d.	cliché *5*	4.	The state of being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings.
e.	obscure *3*	5.	An idea, image, or phrase that has been used so often that it is no longer original.
f.	consciousness *4*	6.	To understand or interpret something difficult to read or understand.

7. Before watching the TED Talk, discuss the questions below with a partner.

- The title of the TED Talk is *You Are Fluent in This Language (And Don't Even Know It).* What do you think the "language" is?
- How do you think people learn this language?

8. Watch the first part of the TED Talk video[1] *You Are Fluent in This Language (And Don't Even Know It)* (00:00–06:18). Take notes and be prepared to discuss the questions below with the class.

a. Why does the speaker think people are already fluent in the language of images?

People understand pictures and symbols naturally. They can recognise and interpret images without anyone teaching them how.

b. How can a simple picture communicate a complex idea? Give one example from the talk.

A simple picture can represent a much bigger idea. For example, a graduation cap represents education or college, not just a hat. (Other acceptable examples: warning sign = panic, airplane armrest = modern-day struggle, neck pillow = discomfort.)

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0R9zjn9BBvA

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c. Which example from the talk did you find the funniest or most memorable? Why?

Suggested answer:
Answers will vary.

Examples:
The airplane armrest because everyone has experienced it.
The neck pillow because it is supposed to be comfortable but usually isn't.
The sleeping child because it was funny and easy to recognise.

d. According to the speaker, why do simple drawings often work better than detailed ones?

Because our brains fill in the missing details. Simple drawings make people think and imagine the rest, which makes them more powerful and memorable.

9. Homework: Watch the second part of the TED Talk You Are Fluent in This Language (And Don't Even Know It) (06:19–12:28).

What was the most interesting idea from the second half of the talk? Be ready to explain your answer in the next lesson.

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