

## **Sherlock Holmes**

### **Non-verbal Communication Activity**

Today you are going to be part of a very important experiment. In order for this experiment to work, you must not talk or vocalize in any way. We are going to communicate strictly by nonverbal means.

INSTRUCTIONS: Throughout the class period, you will be asked to express your feelings. You will need to use a blank piece of paper to record the following *italicized* information.

1. Line up according to birth date. For example, January 3 before January 18, then March 7, May 12, etc. The year of birth is not important. There should not be any verbal communication. When finished, *write down the people you stood between.*
2. Read the article, "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" and the remainder of the packet.
3. "Object language" is one type of non-verbal communication. It simply is the intentional or unintentional display of material things. It might be art objects, machines, clothing, jewelry, etc. A social worker who appears in a ghetto neighborhood driving a flashy car and wearing expensive clothing is obviously using the wrong language if he/she hopes to establish rapport with the people. *Write a list of five objects or items in the room and describe the message you receive from each of them.* (The objects may be part of some one's attire.)
4. Watch the program playing on the television for ten minutes. This will not have any vocalization or music included. After viewing the program for 10 minutes, you must *write a description of what you observed.* Be sure to include the story line, facial expressions, eye contact, body movements, hand gestures, physical appearance, and feelings of the characters.
5. Look at each of the advertisements posted around the room. All of the written communication has been eliminated. Try to identify what the people in the ads are trying to portray. *Write on your answer sheet your own captions for each ad according to what you think they are trying to say.*

### **The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes**

One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888-- I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice) when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the *Study in Scarlet*, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his

attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem, I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own,

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner, Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again. I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"

"My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Janet she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice; but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out,"

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he: "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slaver. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession."

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. "When I hear you give your reasons," I remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair.  
"You see, but you do not observe," (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Scandal in Bohemia*)

Sometimes it's difficult to know how other people really feel. Often they don't know for sure themselves, and other times they have some reason for not wanting to tell us, but in either case there are times when we can't find out what is going on inside another's mind simply by asking.

What should we do in these cases? They happen every day, and often in the most important situations. Sherlock Holmes said the way to understand people was to watch them--not only to see, but to observe.

Observing yourself and others is nonverbal communication – the way we express ourselves, not by what we say, but by what we do.

Stop for a moment and examine yourself as you read this. If someone were observing you now, what nonverbal clues would they get about how you're feeling? Are you sitting forward or reclining back? Is your posture tense or relaxed? Are your eyes wide open, or do they keep closing? What does your facial expression communicate? Can you make your face expressionless? Don't people with expressionless faces communicate something to you?

Of course, we don't always intend to send nonverbal messages. Consider, for instance, behaviors like blushing, frowning, sweating, or stammering. We rarely try to act in these ways, and often we're not aware when we're doing so. Nonetheless, others recognize signs like these and make interpretations about us based on their observations.

The fact that you and everyone around you is constantly sending off nonverbal clues is important because it means that you have a constant source of information available about yourself and others. If you can tune into these signals, you'll be more aware of how those around you are feeling and thinking, and you'll be better able to respond to their behavior

### **Nonverbal Communication Transmits Feelings**

Even though feelings are communicated quite well nonverbally, thoughts don't lend themselves to nonverbal channels. Without being able to use words, peoples' bodies generally express how they feel - nervous, embarrassed, playful, friendly, etc.

Here's a list that contains both thoughts and feelings. Try to express each item nonverbally, and see which ones come most easily:

You're tired.

You're in favor of capital punishment.

You're attracted to another person in the group.

You think marijuana should be legalized.

You're angry at someone in the group.

### **Nonverbal Communication Serves Many Functions**

Verbal and non-verbal communication are interconnected elements in every act of communication. Nonverbal behaviors can operate in several relationships to verbal messages.

First, nonverbal behaviors can *repeat* what is said verbally. If someone asked you for directions to the nearest drugstore, you could say, "North of here about two blocks," and then repeat your instructions nonverbally by pointing north.

Nonverbal messages may also *substitute* for verbal ones. When you see a familiar friend wearing a certain facial expression, you don't need to ask, "How's it going?" In the same way, experience has probably shown you that other kinds of looks, gestures, and other clues say, "I'm angry at you" or "I feel great" far better than words.

A third way in which verbal and nonverbal messages can relate is called *complementing*. If you saw a student talking to a teacher, and his head was bowed slightly, his voice was low and hesitating, and he shuffled slowly from foot to foot, you might conclude that he felt inferior to the teacher, possibly embarrassed about something he did. The nonverbal behaviors you observed provided the context for the verbal behaviors--they conveyed the relationship between the teacher and student. Complementing nonverbal behaviors signal the attitudes, the interactants have for one another.

Nonverbal behaviors can also *accent* verbal messages. Just as we can use *italics* in print to underline an idea, we can emphasize some part of a face-to-face message in various ways. Pointing an accusing finger adds emphasis to criticism (as well as probably creating defensiveness in the receiver). Shrugging shoulders accent confusion, and hugs can highlight excitement or affection.

Nonverbal behavior also serves to *regulate* verbal behavior. By lowering your voice at the end of a sentence, "trailing off," you indicate that the other person may speak. You can also convey this information through the use of eye contact and by the way you position your body.

Finally--and often most significantly--nonverbal behavior can often *contradict* the spoken word. People often simultaneously express different and even contradictory messages in their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. A common example of this sort of "double message" is the experience we've all had of hearing someone with a red face and bulging veins yelling, "Angry? No, I'm not angry!"

Usually, however, the contradiction between words and nonverbal clues isn't this obvious. At times we all try to seem different than we are. There are many reasons for this contradictory behavior: to cover nervousness when giving a speech or in a job interview, to keep someone from worrying about us, or to appear more attractive than we believe we really are.

Even though some of the ways in which people contradict themselves are subtle, double messages have a strong impact. Research suggests that when a receiver perceives an inconsistency between verbal and nonverbal messages, the unspoken cue carries more weight.

### **Body Orientation**

Body orientation is the degree to which we face toward or away from someone with our body, feet, and head. When in a group situation by turning your body slightly away from an intruder you can make your feelings very clear. An intruder finds herself in the difficult position of trying to talk over your shoulder, and it isn't long before she gets the message and goes her way. The nonverbal message here is "Look, we're interested in each other right now and don't want to include you in our conversation." Facing someone directly signals your interest, and facing away signals a desire to avoid involvement. This explains how we can pack ourselves into intimate distance with total strangers in places like a crowded elevator without offending others. Because there is a very indirect orientation here (everyone is usually standing shoulder to shoulder facing in the same direction), we understand that despite the close quarters everyone wants to avoid personal contact.

By observing the way people position themselves you can learn a good deal about how they feel. Next time you're in a crowded place where people can choose whom to face directly, try observing who seems to be included in the action and who is being subtly shut out. And in the same way, pay attention to your own body orientation. You may be surprised to discover that you're avoiding a certain person without being conscious of it or that at times you're "turning your back" on people altogether. If this is the case, it may be helpful to figure out why. Are you avoiding an unpleasant situation that needs clearing up, communicating your annoyance or dislike for the other, or sending some other message?

### **Posture**

Another way we communicate nonverbally is through our posture. To see if this is true, stop reading for a moment and notice how you're sitting. What does your position say nonverbally about how you feel? Are there any other people near you now? What messages do you get from their present posture? By paying attention to the postures of those around you, as well as your own, you'll find another channel of nonverbal communication that can furnish information about how people feel about themselves and each other.

Psychologist Albert Mehrabian has found that postural keys to feelings are tension and relaxation. He says that we take relaxed postures in non-threatening situations and tighten up when threatened. Based on this observation he says we can tell a good deal about how others feel simply by watching how tense or loose they seem to be. For example, he suggests that watching tenseness is a way of detecting status differences: The lower-status person is generally the more rigid, tense-appearing one, whereas the one with higher status is more relaxed. This is the kind of situation that often happens when we picture a "chat" with the boss (or professor, judge, etc.) where we sit ramrod straight while she leans back in her chair. The same principle applies to social situations, where it's often possible to tell who's uncomfortable by looking at

pictures. Often you'll see someone laughing and talking as if he were perfectly at home, but his posture almost shouts nervousness. Some people never relax, and their posture shows it.

## **Gestures**

Gestures are another good source of nonverbal communication. In an article titled "Nonverbal Leakage and Clues to Deception" Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen observed how gestures transmit emotions. They explained that because most of us, at least unconsciously, know that the face is the most obvious channel of expressing emotions, we're especially careful to control our facial expressions when trying to hide our feelings. But more of us are less aware of the ways we move our hands, legs, and feet, and because of this these movements are better indicators of how we truly feel.

Probably the clearest example of someone whose feelings show through gestures is the fidgeter. They're the kind of people who assure us that "everything is fine" while almost ceaselessly biting their fingernails, flicking their cigarette, bending paperclips, and so on.

Besides nervousness, you can often detect other emotions from a person's gestures. It's possible to observe anger by looking beyond a smile and noticing the whitened knuckles and clenched fists. When people would like to express their friendship or attraction toward us, but for some reason feel they can't we can sometimes notice them slightly reaching out or maybe even opening their hands. Gestures play other roles—repeating, substituting, complementing, accenting, and regulating in conversations.

## **The Face and Eyes**

The face and eyes are probably the most noticed parts of the body, but this doesn't mean that their nonverbal messages are the easiest to read. The face is a tremendously complicated channel of expression.

It's hard even to describe the number and kind of expressions we commonly produce with our face and eyes. There are at least eight distinguishable positions of the eyebrow and forehead, eight more of the eyes and lids, and ten for the lower face. When you multiply this complexity by the number of emotions we experience, you can see why it would be almost impossible to compile a dictionary of facial expressions and their corresponding emotions.

Ekman and Friesen have identified six basic emotions that facial expressions reflect—surprise, fear, anger, disgust, happiness, and sadness. The eyes themselves can send several kinds of messages. Meeting someone's glance with your eyes is usually a sign of involvement, while looking away signals a desire to avoid contact. This is why solicitors on the street-panhandlers, salesmen, petitioners--try to catch our eye. Once they've managed to establish contact with a glance, it becomes harder for the approached person to draw away.

Most of us remember trying to avoid a question we didn't understand by glancing away from the teacher. At times like these we usually became very interested in our textbooks, fingernails, the clock--anything but the teacher's stare. Of course, the teacher always seemed to know the

meaning of this nonverbal behavior and ended up picking on those of us who signaled our uncertainty.

## **Voice**

The voice itself is another channel of nonverbal communication. We don't mean the words we say, which after all make up verbal communication but rather how we say them. If you think about it for a moment, you'll realize that a certain way of speaking can give the same word or words many meanings. For example, look at the possible meanings from a single sentence just by changing the word emphasis:

*This* is a fantastic communication book.

(Not just any book, but this one in particular.)

This is a *fantastic* communication book.

(This book is superior, exciting.)

This is a fantastic *communication* book.

(The book is good as far as communication goes; it may not be so great as literature, drama, etc.) This is a fantastic communication *book*.

(It's not a play or record, it's a book.)

It's possible to get an idea across without ever expressing it outright by emphasizing a certain word in a sentence. For example, a State Department official in the Nixon administration, was able to express the government's position in an off-the-record way when answering questions. He had three different ways of saying "I would not speculate." When he added no accent, he meant the department didn't really know; when he emphasized the "I", he meant "I wouldn't, but you may--and with some assurance"; when he emphasized "speculate," he meant that the questioner's premise was probably wrong.

There are many other ways our voice communicates--through its tone, speed, pitch, and number and length of pauses, volume, and disfluencies (such as stammering, use of "uh," "um," "er," and so on). All these factors together can be called "paralanguage," and they can do a great deal to reinforce or contradict the message our words convey,

Communication through paralanguage isn't always intentional. Often our voices give us away when we're trying to create an impression different from our actual feelings. For example, you've probably had experiences of trying to sound calm and serene when you were really exploding with inner nervousness. Maybe your deception went along perfectly for a while--just the right smile, no telltale fidgeting of the hands, posture appearing relaxed--and then, without being able to do a thing about it, right in the middle of your relaxed comments your voice squeaked! The charade was over.

## **Touching**

Touching is essential to our healthy development. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a large percentage of children born every year died from a disease then called *marasmus*, which translated from Greek means 'wasting away.' In some orphanages the mortality rate was nearly 100 %, but even children in the most "progressive" homes, hospitals,

and other institutions died regularly from the ailment. When researchers finally tracked down the causes of this disease, they found that the infants suffered from lack of physical contact with parents or nurses, rather than nutrition, medical care, or other factors. They hadn't been touched enough, and as a result they died. From this knowledge came the practice of "mothering" children in institutions--picking the baby up, carrying it around, and handling it several times each day. At one hospital that began this practice, the death rate for infants fell from between 30 and 35 percent to below 10 percent.

Touch seems to increase a child's mental functioning as well as physical health. L. J. Yarrow has conducted surveys which show that babies who have been given plenty of physical stimulation by their mothers have significantly higher IQs than those receiving less contact.

Touch can communicate many messages. Besides the nurturing/caring function it can convey friendship, sexual interest, and aggressiveness. Touch can serve as a means of managing transactions, such as when we tug at another's sleeve.

### **Clothing**

Besides protecting us from catching colds, clothes can be decorative, a means of identification with groups, devices for sexual attraction, indicators of status, markers of certain roles and even a means of concealment. Clothes communicate some of these functions far more clearly than others. For instance, there's little doubt that someone dressed in a uniform, wearing a badge, and carrying handcuffs and a gun is a police officer. On the other hand, while wrinkled, ill-fitting, dirty old clothes might be a sign that the wearer is a destitute drifter, they might also be the outfit of a worker on vacation, a normally stylish person who is on the way to clean a fireplace, or of an emotionally upset person, or even an eccentric millionaire.

People do intentionally send messages about themselves by what they wear, and we make interpretations about others on this basis. Think about the people you know. See if you can tell anything about their personal attitudes or social philosophies by the way they dress.

Take a look at your friends. Do you find that the people who spend time together share the same ideas about clothing? Is there a "uniform" for political radicals and one for conservatives? Is there a high fashion "uniform" that tells the public who's in style and who's out of it?

There is a real danger inherent in reading many nonverbal messages. That danger is that we find ourselves stereotyping others on skimpy evidence, and often our interpretations are mistaken. By jumping to conclusions about another human from these surface appearances, we may very well be stereotyping ourselves out of some important relationships. There's an old generalization that you can't judge a book by its cover. In light of what we know about nonverbal communication we could change it to "You can tell only a little about a book from its cover; you need to have more information before you'll be able to speak with any authority about it." (Taken from Looking Out/Looking In by Ronald B. Adler and Neil Towne, publisher: Holt. Rinehart, Winston.