



Communicating with Signs

Age Groups: 1st-3rd grade

Program Duration: 1 hr

Category:

- Social Studies

Materials:

- Pre-recorded video segments for virtual version
- Emoji examples
- Shoe examples
- Pencils
- White Paper
- Crayons, Markers, Colored Pencils

Educational Standards:

Ohio Grade 1: History strand 2 and Economic strand 12; Ohio Grade 2: History strand 2 and Economic strand 15; Ohio Grade 3: History strand 2 and Economic strand 17

Objectives/Key Concepts

Participants will better understand how we use signs to communicate ideas by looking at artifacts that show how businesses have used signs to attract consumers.

During the program we will discuss

- What a symbol is
- What a trade sign is
- How the invention of electricity and later neon affected how businesses used signs
- How to apply what we saw by creating our own trade signs

Background Information

Business have used signs since ancient times when they were used in Rome to show which public spaces were stores or to promote events. In ancient China, a needle shop used the image of a white rabbit, a symbol of good luck, on their signs to attract customers who could not read.

Using symbols to attract customers continued into the Middle Ages and spread across countries. Pubs and Inns were required by law to have a sign so that



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inspectors would know which locations to check for the quality of food and drink. Though not legally required, trade businesses began to follow pubs and inns in having signs so customers could tell from which family they were buying. Because most of the customers were still unable to read, they used symbols that represented their trade. For example, a business that repaired boots would have an image of a boot on their sign.

These early signs were the inspiration for modern signage.

Set Up

- If virtual: arrange video chat details with the program contact- will you be joining their normal call or does an independent link need to be created? Ensure a laptop with webcam and microphone is charged and setup in a quiet location. Have the pre-recorded videos open and ready for screen sharing. Have the emoji examples on hand to show the class during the presentation as part of the introduction.
- If in person: set up tables and chairs in the event space and have paper and pencils on each table (keep the coloring materials aside). Have the emoji examples with you or near the Letter Wall to use as part of the introduction.

Presentation/Procedures

Welcome the students and introduce yourself. If in person, go over museum manners (why we don't touch, using walking feet, taking turns talking, etc.). Explain that you will be looking at how we use signs to communicate during this program.

If in person, begin at letter wall Begin by asking if anyone knows what the word symbol means. Repeat any answers for the group and let them know if they are correct/on the right track/not quite there. Rephrase any correct answers or share with them that a symbol is a picture that represents something. Tell them that you are going to show them some symbols they probably know. Hold up each emoji card in turn and ask them to share what it stands for. Ask them if they can share any other emoji symbols and their meanings. Transition to the next stop by explaining how we are going to look at how businesses used symbols for their signs.

If virtual, play trade sign video in screen share mode. If in person, move to the corner of Pre-Electric across from Big Boy Explain that businesses from long ago



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could not rely on words alone for their signs and ask why they think that might have been. Summarize any answers given and guide them to the idea that most people did not know how to read. Instead, businesses would use symbols for what goods or services they provided. Look at the different trade signs and ask them to identify each symbol and what they think the business of the sign would have been. *If virtual, wait for the video to end and exit screen share to ask the questions.* Transition to the next stop by sharing that we are going to see how trade signs changed over time.

If virtual, play Regal Boot video in screen share mode. If in person, move to the Regal Boot Ask the students what trade or business Regal might have been. After they answer, ask how this sign is different from the one we just saw. Summarize answers and then explain how the invention of electricity and using metal allowed for bigger and more noticeable signs. *If virtual, wait for video to end and exit screen share to repeat the questions and discuss.* Transition to the next stop by explaining that as technology improved, the signs became even more eye-catching.

If virtual, play early neon video in screen share mode. If in person, move to the Early Neon section to look at the shoe repair signs Explain that experiments with electricity showed that certain gases would glow when electrified. Neon glows orange and red and argon can glow blue when mixed with mercury and yellow or white when mixed with helium. Sign builders learned how to bend glass into different shapes using hot flames. Encourage them to look at the shoe repair signs and ask how they are similar and different to the trade signs they saw earlier. *If virtual, wait for video to end and exit screen share to repeat the questions and discuss.* Transition to the next stop by explaining how they are going to see more neon and even some signs made from plastic.

If virtual play big neon video in screen share mode. If in person, walk through the Big Neon section. Take any questions that might come up, but this is will not be an area of focus for the tour. Transition to the next stop by explaining how they are now going to see our Main Street.

If virtual play Main Street video in screen share mode. If in person, move to Main Street in between McDonald's and Earl Schibe. Explain that Main Street is setup so they can see how the signs would've looked on actual businesses. Walk them through Main Street and point out the different kinds of businesses represented on



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the street. Challenge them to count all of the restaurant signs they can find. Gather the group together and ask a few students to share a few facts they learned during the tour as a recap. *If virtual, exit screen share mode at this point and ask for recap on live video.* Transition to the activity by sharing that they are now going to create their own trade sign.

If virtual, stay in live mode for the rest of the presentation. If in person, move to the event space and have children sit at spots with supplies. Explain that they are now going to get a chance to create their own trade sign. Encourage them to brainstorm different stores or places they like to go to or do OR if they were going to run a business about themselves what they might sell using one piece of white paper and pencil. Once they have an option (or two to help with this next step), have them think about a symbol that could represent their chosen business. For example, Dairy Queen as an ice cream cone. Once they have their symbol, have them design and draw their symbol on either the back of their white paper or on a new sheet. Encourage them to use as much of the page as they can so it is easier for them to color. *If in person, pass out coloring tools at this point.* If there is time, have students share which business they chose and show their signs.

Clean Up

- Collect unused paper, pencils, and coloring materials for future use. Return the event space to its normal setup.

Safety

- When in person, encourage good museum manners of keeping hands to ourselves to avoid breaking light bulbs.