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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents five activities that deal with nonverbal communication. The booklet outlines instructional objectives for the student: to describe nonverbal communication and identify at least three examples; to explain why the face is an important source of information; to recognize and describe environmental factors that influence communication; and to select appropriate nonverbal signals to support verbal messages. Activities in the booklet involve body language, communicating with space, communicating with clothing, and mixed messages. (RS)

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# NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Language without words

ED 399 603

## INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this unit, the students should be able to

- Describe nonverbal communication and identify at least three examples.
- Explain why the face is an important source of information.
- Recognize and describe environmental factors that influence communication.
- Select appropriate nonverbal signals to support verbal messages.

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Sigmund Freud once described how we communicate without words, how: "no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."

Nonverbal communication is perpetual and often involuntary. It is constant: as long as there is someone to observe the behavior of another, there is communication. It is estimated that over 65 percent of social meaning is communicated nonverbally.

Nonverbal communication is also ambiguous. Like language, the meaning must be interpreted. The messages that we interpret from nonverbal language may not be the true meaning or intent. Therefore, it is important to evaluate nonverbal cues in the context that it occurs.

People who are sensitive to nonverbal cues are much more able to listen, provide support, and handle interpersonal conflict effectively.

### You May Consult This Nonverbal Communication Reading List:

Davis, Flora, *Inside Intuition: What We Know About Non-verbal Communication*. McGraw-Hill, 1974.

Fast, Julius, *Body Language*. Pocket Books, 1981.

Pease, Allan, *Signals*. Bantam Books, 1984.

Sohn, Marjorie, *The Importance of Clothing*. 4-H clothing project books. University of Illinois, Urbana, 1981.

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## SUGGESTED MEETING PLAN

1. Introduction: Can You See What I'm Not Saying? (3 to 5 minutes)
2. Body Language (Select one activity)  
Activity 1: Mum's the Word (20 minutes)  
Activity 2: Body Talking (10 to 15 minutes)
3. Communicating with Space (10 minutes)  
Activity 3: Invading My Space
4. Communicating with Clothing (10 minutes)  
Discussion: The Cat's Pajamas  
Advanced Discussion: All Dressed Up
5. Mixed Messages (5 to 10 minutes)  
Activity 4: Tell It Like It Isn't  
Activity 5: "Jones Family" Quiz
6. Summary (5 minutes)
7. Supplemental Activities

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## INTRODUCTION: *Can you see what I'm not saying?*

How many different ways have you communicated with someone today? What kind of messages did you send or receive?

Did you make a telephone call? Did anyone write a note to you? Did you stop for a red light? Did your classroom get quiet when the bell rang?

Have you noticed that much of what we've been talking about as everyday communication doesn't even involve words? We have a name for that kind of language: nonverbal. Stopping at a red light and quieting the classroom with a bell are examples of nonverbal communication.

You may not be familiar with that term. But as we learn about nonverbal communication, you'll be sur-

prised how much you already know and use this way of showing others what you think and feel.

When we talk about nonverbal messages, we're talking about all the ways that we can let someone know how we feel or what we think without using words. For example, you may smile to show that you're in a good mood. Or you may scream and jump back if someone drops a spider in your lap, to show you're frightened. If someone asks for directions, you may point or draw a map as you answer.

We're going to talk about some of the ways you can send messages without using words. We can send messages without words by using touch and the space around us, and even by what we wear.

## BODY LANGUAGE

Probably the most important way that we communicate without using words is with body language—our facial expressions, hand gestures, movement, and posture. Body language is especially effective for showing our emotions.

If you have ever watched a mime perform, you were probably amazed by the many ways a mime can communicate feelings and ideas without words. A mime uses body language to do the talking.

## ACTIVITY 1 *Mum's the Word*

<b>Objective</b>	Use body language to convey feelings and ideas.
<b>Time</b>	5 minutes planning for skits, 1 to 3 minutes per skit
<b>Ages</b>	10 to 15 years
<b>Preparation</b>	Read over the list of suggested skit ideas to determine what props, if any, are needed.  Make copies of the skit ideas.  Cut apart the ideas and place them in an envelope, bowl, or hat.

### Instructions

1. Split students into groups of three or four.
2. Explain that each group will act out a scene without using words, only body language. Explain that they will also watch the other skits and try to guess what is happening in each one.
3. Have each group draw one skit idea from the envelope or bowl.
4. Give each group up to five minutes to discuss how they will act out the idea. Explain that not everyone has to act, but everyone should contribute an idea about how to perform the skit.
5. Ask each group to perform its skit. When each skit is finished, bring up the discussion questions that match each skit idea.
6. When all the skits have been performed, lead the general discussion about body language.

**Skit #1**

**Putting on new gloves. At first you struggle because they are too tight. But you succeed. You are proud and pleased.**

**Skit #7**

**Receiving an award in front of the class. Decide if it is a medal or a plaque. Remember to show how you feel.**

**Skit #2**

**Blowing a large bubble with gum. You work very hard. Then it breaks. You are surprised and then sad.**

**Skit #8**

**One of you discovers that your contact lens is missing. The other is a good friend and tries to help find it.**

**Skit #3**

**Picking a flower and smelling it. It smells very good. Then a bee flies up and stings you. Ouch!**

**Skit #9**

**Changing a diaper. Pretend the baby REALLY needs to be changed. Try to get the other actor to do the work.**

**Skit #4**

**Climbing a steep hill. You are excited and happy at first. Then you get very tired and slow down. Then finally, you make it to the top. You are proud and happy.**

**Skit #10**

**Looking in an empty refrigerator for a snack when you are really hungry.**

**Skit #5**

**Playing softball. Try some of the following—pitching, getting a hit, striking out, making a home run, and fielding a ball. Remember to show how you feel when each of these things happens.**

**Skit #11**

**Picking apples with a friend. Neither of you can reach a certain branch by yourself. You both try to do it on your own and fall. Then you work together.**

**Skit #6**

**A driving lesson. The instructor is nervous. The student is very near-**

## Discussion Questions

### *Skit #1*

- What was happening in this skit?
- What kind of gloves? (too tight)
- What made you think that the gloves were too tight?
- How did the mime feel about the gloves?
- How did you know?

### *Skit #2*

- What was happening in this skit?
- What emotions were shown?
- How did you know?

### *Skit #3*

- What was happening in this skit?
- How did the flower smell?
- How did you know?
- How did the mime feel when the bee attacked?

### *Skit #4*

- What was happening in this skit?
- Can you name three emotions you saw?
- How did you know the mime was getting tired, frustrated?
- How did you recognize the moment of triumph when the mime finally reached the top?

### *Skit #5*

- What was happening in this skit?
- Were the mimes excited?
- What other emotions did you see?
- Did the mimes use their faces to show emotions?
- Did they use other parts of their bodies to communicate?

### *Skit #6*

- What was happening in this skit?
- Did it take a while to figure out what was happening?
- What did you think was happening at first?
- How did you know how each mime was feeling?

### *Skit #7*

- What was happening in this skit?
- Even if you couldn't tell what was happening, could you tell how the mimes felt?
- Were the mimes happy and proud? How did they show it?

### *Skit #8*

- What was happening in this skit?
- How did the mime feel when the contact was missing?
- Are these two characters supposed to be good friends?

- How did they show they were good friends?
- How many different emotions did the mimes show?

### *Skit #9*

- What was happening in this skit?
- How did the mimes feel about the situation they were in?
- How did each mime try to get the other one to change the diaper?

### *Skit #10*

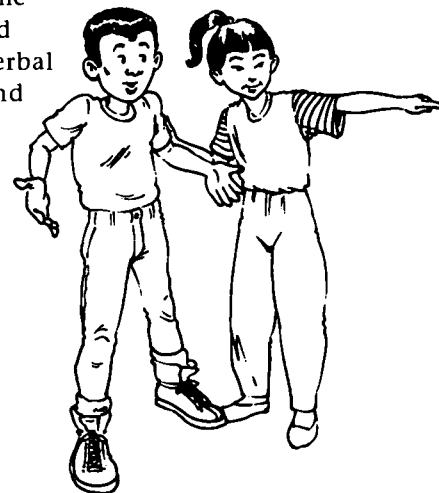
- What was happening in this skit?
- Do you think it's been a while since the shopping has been done?
- How did you know the characters were hungry?

### *Skit #11*

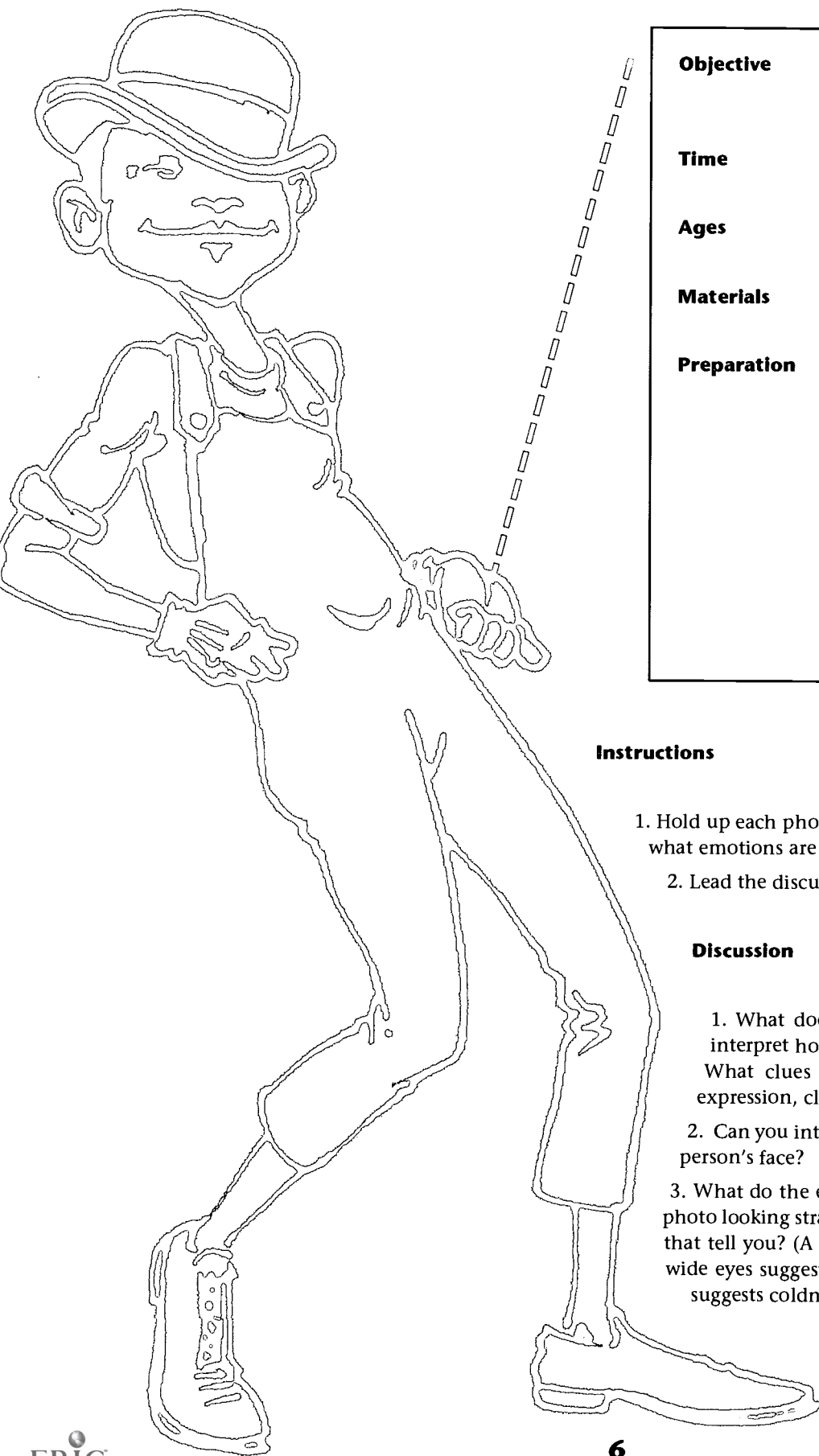
- What was happening in this skit?
- How did the characters feel when they couldn't reach the apples?
- Then what happened?
- How did the mimes show how they felt?

## General Discussion

1. Which message was the hardest to understand without using words? Which message did everyone get right away?
2. Do you think it is easier to show feelings or ideas? Why? (We can express feelings through facial expressions, but it is much more difficult to express what we think without words.)
3. What are some of the different kinds of body language used in the skits? (facial expressions, hand gestures, movement of body or body parts, speed of movement, rhythm of movement, posture)
4. Who else besides a mime uses body language and other forms of nonverbal communication to send messages? (actors, singers, dancers, musicians, politicians, police officers, comedians, clowns, teachers—almost everyone) What messages do they convey?



## ACTIVITY 2 *Body Talking*



**Objective** Identify nonverbal messages through body language

**Time** 10 to 15 minutes, total

**Ages** 15 to 18 years

**Materials** Magazine cutouts

**Preparation** Cut out 5 to 10 pictures of people from magazines.

Select several pictures in which people are interacting with others and showing different emotions. Cut out a few advertisement photos portraying models.

### Instructions

1. Hold up each photo and ask the students to describe what emotions are portrayed.
2. Lead the discussion using the following questions.

### Discussion

1. What does each photo say to you? Can you interpret how the person in the photo is feeling? What clues give you this information? (facial expression, clothes, hand gestures, posture)
2. Can you interpret more than one emotion in the person's face?
3. What do the eyes say to you? Is the person in the photo looking straight at the camera? If not, what does that tell you? (A downward glance suggests modesty; wide eyes suggest wonder, honesty, or fright; staring suggests coldness.)

## COMMUNICATING WITH SPACE

Like body language, space can also be used to get a message across to another person. Sitting or standing very close to a person sends one message. Placing distance between yourself and another person sends a totally different message. Think of personal space as an invisible bubble that surrounds you.

Have you ever had someone come too close to you and you wanted to back away? That person was invading your personal space. This feels uncomfortable, especially when you don't know the other person very well. We generally stand closer to communicate with the people we know and further away to talk with people we've just met.

### ACTIVITY 3 *Invading My Space*

<b>Objective</b>	Recognize that physical space can influence communication.
<b>Time</b>	15 minutes, total
<b>Ages</b>	8 to 19 years
<b>Preparation</b>	Minimal

#### Instructions

1. Ask for two volunteers or select two individuals to pose as mimes.
2. Explain to each what he or she will demonstrate.
3. Allow a minute or two for the mimes to think about their task.
4. Ask each to perform the demonstration.
5. Ask the other students to respond to the provided questions after each demonstration.
6. Continue on to the general discussion about space.

#### Demonstration Ideas

1. Pretend you're inside an invisible box—like a big carton that a refrigerator comes in. You're surprised, curious. Then it starts to shrink! What else can you do?

##### *discussion*

- Did it take a long time to guess what was happening?
- How did the mime feel at the beginning of the demonstration?
- How did the mime feel when the box started to shrink?

2. Pretend that you're in a five-story building. Get several of the students herded into an imaginary elevator. But don't talk. Use your faces, hands, and whole bodies to move them around. Stop at each floor and add another person.

##### *discussion*

- Did you figure out that you were in an elevator?
- How did you know what the mime wanted you to do?
- Were you comfortable when you were all squashed together?
- Why not?

#### General Discussion

1. When you look for a seat on a bus or in a fast-food restaurant, do you leave an empty seat between you and a stranger? Why? (When you choose a seat that is several seats away from another person, you will generally give the other person the impression that you do not wish to have a conversation with them.)
2. If you share a room with your brother or sister, do you divide the room so that you each have your own space? How do you do that?
3. How is space arranged in your classroom? Are desks always arranged facing toward the front of the room, or are they sometimes placed in a circle for better discussions?

## COMMUNICATING WITH CLOTHING

### Discussion: *The Cat's Pajamas*

<b>Objective</b>	Realize that clothing gives many messages.
<b>Time</b>	10 minutes, total
<b>Ages</b>	8 to 15 years
<b>Preparation</b>	Minimal

Clothing is another form of nonverbal communication that can cause people to relate to each other in a certain manner. People choose clothes to send messages about their individual personalities.

What are you wearing today? Did you spend a lot of time deciding what to wear, or did you throw your clothes on with little thought about how you will look?

Your clothes say a lot about you. When someone meets you for the first time, what you are wearing will make an impression. If you're not convinced that clothes speak their own language, think back to a time when you were overdressed or underdressed for an event, such as a wedding, family get-together, school outing, or other function. Did you feel uncomfortable and out of place?

#### Discussion

1. What types of clothing do you wear to school? To church? To a party? Why?
2. Do you use clothing to say something about your personality?
3. What other kinds of messages can we send about our clothes?
  - What kind of work we do: uniform, name badges, carrying tools
  - What activity we're going to do: old clothes for yardwork, fancy clothes to attend a wedding or go to church
  - What we think the weather will be: carrying umbrella; wearing coats, scarves, and mittens
  - Ethnic background: clothes like our ancestors wore
  - Male or female: our ideas of how women and girls should dress and how men and boys should dress
4. What occupations require uniforms? (police officers, nurses, doctors, sports teams) Why do they wear uniforms?

### Advanced Discussion: *All Dressed Up*

<b>Objective</b>	Recognize that both group pressure and personal likes shape the messages our clothing sends.
<b>Time</b>	10 minutes, total
<b>Ages</b>	15 to 18 years
<b>Preparation</b>	Minimal

In certain circumstances, your clothes can make you feel unattractive, or can give you self confidence. Your clothes can help you blend into a group or show your individuality. How important are clothes to you? If you're in high school, chances are you give a great deal of thought to what you wear, and you notice what others are wearing, too. That's because clothes say a lot about a person.

#### Discussion

1. What is your clothes style? What are you trying to say with your clothes? Do you like to dress just like the other students, or do you prefer to wear clothes that reflect your individual style?
2. How would you feel if your school administrators decided that school uniforms will be mandatory? Why would you feel that way?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of mandatory school uniforms?
4. What styles of clothing do others wear in your school? Can you determine what cliques they might belong to by the clothes they wear?
5. Do students wear "gang colors" and styles in your school? What would happen if a student who is not a member of a gang wore gang colors?



## MIXED MESSAGES

Now that we've learned about the various elements of nonverbal communication, let's discuss how hand gestures, facial expressions, space and other factors might clash with what you are saying. Have you ever heard the expression "actions speak louder than words"? Nonverbal messages can be so "loud" that we don't even hear what the person is actually speaking to us, or sometimes we don't believe them.

For example, if you're sitting with your head in your hands, all slumped over, pouting, I may have trouble believing your words if you tell me that nothing's wrong. You're sending a "mixed message." Your words tell me one thing, but your body language tells me something else.

If we send mixed messages, we can have a communication breakdown. It is hard to know how someone else feels or thinks if we are receiving mixed messages.

# ACTIVITY 4 *Tell It Like It Isn't*

<b>Objective</b>	Recognize mixed messages that can cause communication barriers.
<b>Time</b>	5 minutes, total
<b>Ages</b>	10 to 19 years
<b>Preparation</b>	Minimal

### Discussion

1. What was the cause of the communication breakdown in this scenario?
2. What message did the mother's body language send to the daughter?
3. Can you think of other examples of "mixed messages"? (apologizing with a smile on your face; attempting to talk about something serious, but laughing as you speak; saying "no," but nodding your head) NOTE—The teacher may want to demonstrate these scenarios so that students will have a greater understanding of the "mixed messages" concept.

Nonverbal messages can also cause communication barriers in other ways, such as when we don't understand the nonverbal cues we are receiving, or we think they mean one thing, when they really mean another.

For example, if you see a woman looking at her watch, you may think that she is bored with the conversation. However, it might also mean that she is late for an appointment. When a man is sitting with his arms folded in front of him, is he withdrawing from the conversation, or is he simply cold?

### Instructions

1. Ask for two volunteers. (The second participant may be an adult volunteer.) Describe the scenario that they will act out.

*Scenario:* Mother and daughter discussing the day's events. The mother is watching tv while the daughter is talking about her day.

Mother: "Tell me about your day."

The daughter begins to describe her activities as the mother continues to watch tv. The mother answers with a few nods of her head during the conversation, but she appears to be concentrating only on the television program.

The daughter becomes frustrated and says, "You're not even listening to me."

Mother: "I'm listening, go ahead." Yet she turns her attention back to the tv.

Finally, the daughter gives up and ends the conversation.

# ACTIVITY 5

## "Jones Family" Quiz

<b>Objective</b>	Recognize that nonverbal cues can have more than one meaning.
<b>Time</b>	15 minutes, total
<b>Ages</b>	8 to 19 years
<b>Materials</b>	Illustration of "Jones family" and quiz questions (see following items)
<b>Preparation Instructions</b>	Make copies of "Jones family" picture and accompanying quiz for each student.

1. Provide a copy of the illustration and quiz questions for each student.
2. Ask the students to determine which questions are true and which are false.
3. When the students have finished, read aloud each of the correct answers.

### SUMMARY

Now that we've observed body language and other forms of nonverbal communication, can you give some reasons why it's such an important part of interpersonal communication?

- Nonverbal communication is often taken for granted.
- Actions can speak louder than words, sometimes distorting the spoken message.
- There are many ways of interpreting nonverbal messages.
- "Listening" to nonverbal messages will help you communicate more effectively with other people.

### SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

1. See the student workbooks for additional activities.
2. Ask the students to bring in magazine or newspaper photo clippings to make a poster or bulletin board showing different forms of nonverbal communication.

### REFERENCES

Fisher, B. Aubrey, *Interpersonal Communication*. Random House, Inc., 1987.

Gamble, Teri Kwal, and Michael, *Communication Works*. Random House, Inc., 1987.

Stewart, John. *Bridges Not Walls* (Fifth Edition). R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 1990.

Jones Family Quiz adapted from Fabun, *As A Matter of Fact*, Glencoe Press, 1968.



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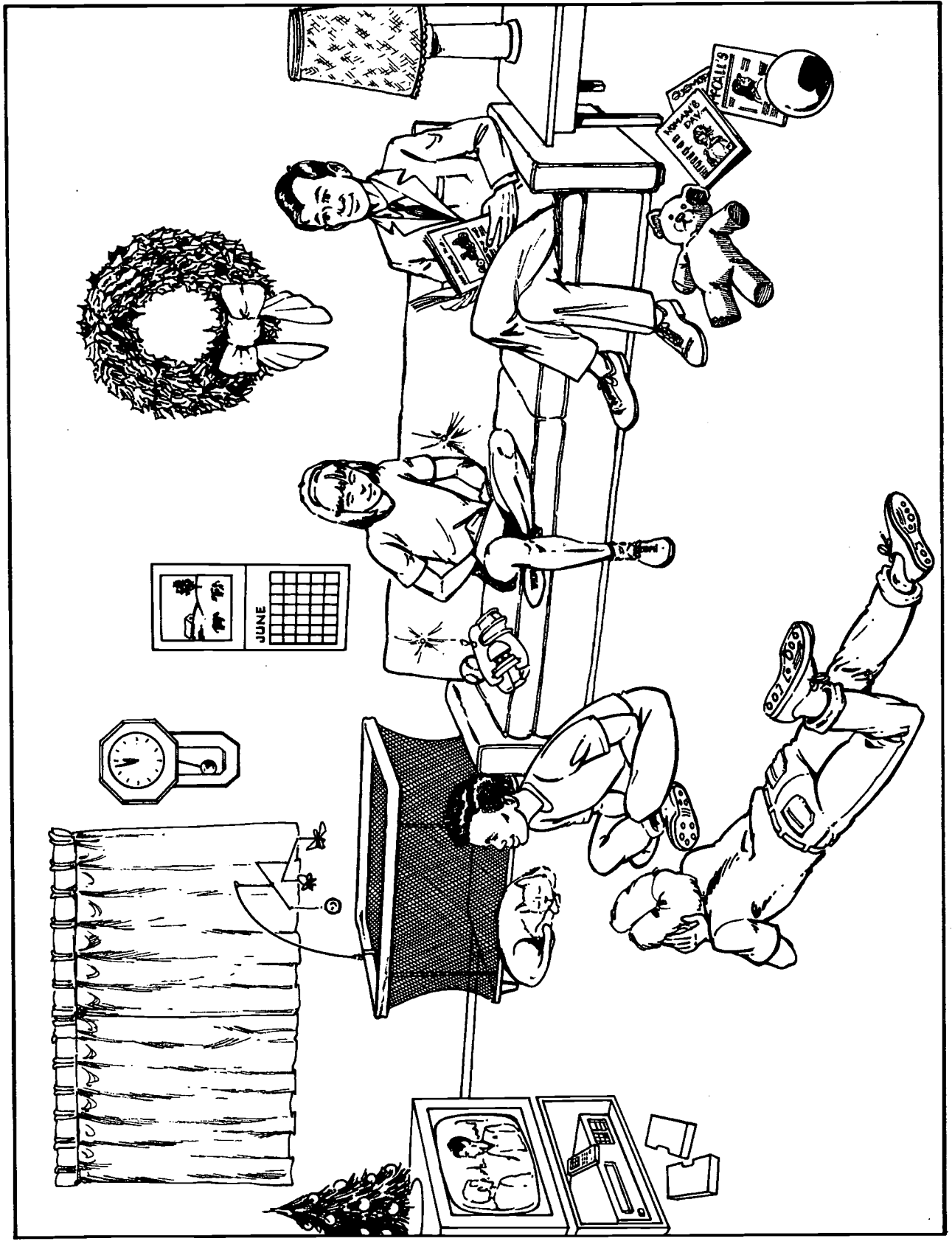
## "JONES FAMILY" QUIZ

Answer true or false to the following statements:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. It is Christmastime.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The Jones family consists of a father, a mother, a baby, a boy, and a girl. One of the boys is a friend or neighbor.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The mother and baby are not at home.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The mother subscribes to *Women's Day* and *Cosmopolitan*.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The father is a businessman.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The boys like to play baseball.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The family has a cat for a pet.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 8. They are watching an evening television program.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The girl is doing her homework.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 10. It is noon.
- 

None of the statements can be said to be true from what you actually saw in the picture.

- 1. Even though there are Christmas decorations in the living room, this fact doesn't necessarily mean it is Christmastime. The family may have not taken down the decorations. The family may have decorated the house for Christmas family photos. The calendar indicates that it is June.
- 2. These people may not even be the Jones family. Or all the people in the picture might be part of the Jones family.
- 3. There may not be a mother or a baby in the family. The father could be raising the children alone. One of the adults may be a day-care provider, which could explain why they would have baby equipment in the living room.
- 4. These magazines may not even belong to the mother. Perhaps they are sample copies that came through the mail.
- 5. The father may or may not be a businessman. He may be a blue-collar worker who happened to attend a funeral, or he may have gone to see his lawyer on that day.
- 6. The baseball and glove may belong to the girl—and not the boys.
- 7. It could be a neighbor's cat making itself "at home."
- 8. They could be watching a videotaped television program anytime of the day or night. Perhaps they are watching a program that they taped from earlier that day.
- 9. She may be doing her homework, but she may also be writing a letter or journal.
- 10. It may be noon or it may be midnight, according to the clock. It could also be that the clock is broken.





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