

SYMBOLS OF SYMBOLS

WE, AS HUMAN beings, can create symbols and give values to them as we please. Anything can be a symbol so long as we agree to make it one. In fact, we can even go so far as to make symbols that stand for symbols.

The alphabet, for example, is a system of symbols (letters) that stand for sounds. We can go one step further and create a new symbol for the letter. This new symbol is called a *cipher*.

Codes and ciphers have a built-in fascination for most people. Nearly everyone at one time has made up a secret language—from Pig Latin to secret codes. All of us can engage in the "symbol-making process," which, as we mentioned earlier, is one of man's primary activities.

Experts are often able to break a code by using their knowledge of the frequency with which letters occur in English. They match the most-used symbols with the most-used letters. The frequency of letters occurring in English words is:

ETAISONHRDLUCMEWYFGBKJQXZ.


NOW!


Secret codes have been a part of wars for a long time. Sometimes code experts have been able to break the enemy's code, but at least once they didn't.

During World War II, the U.S. Army Signal Corps baffled the Japanese with one trick. They sent telephone and radio messages that the Japanese could hear but could not understand. The messages seemed to be a new and seemingly unbreakable code. The catch was that the Signal Corps was not using a code at all. When it wanted to send a secret message, it just put two Navajo Indians to work—one talking Navajo and the other listening. The Japanese did not suspect what was going on.



EXERCISE

The patterns below form a type of cipher that lets us translate letters into lines and dots. For example, the symbol  stands for the letter W. It stands for

M.  stands for L. The symbols below are ciphers for two separate sentences, and each sentence contains all the letters of the alphabet. Can you decipher the sentences? (Answers are on p. 51.)

A	D	G
B	E	H
C	F	I

J	M	P
K	N	Q
L	O	R

S	T	U	V
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W	X	Y	Z
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LAZY TOM FIXED HIS VERY JUNKY CAR

1. THEY WERE NOT EVEN AROUND THE

WHILE BITING INTO A DAIRY QUEEN IN

2. APRIL YOU HAD BETTER SELL THAT

NEW XEROX MACHINE BECAUSE YOU FLUNKED

THE QUIZ MR JENKINS GAVE YOU