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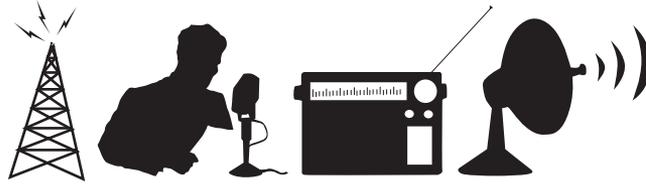
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Everyday Life:
COMMUNICATION

WALTER A. HAZEN

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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Dedication

To Martha, Jordan, and Allison

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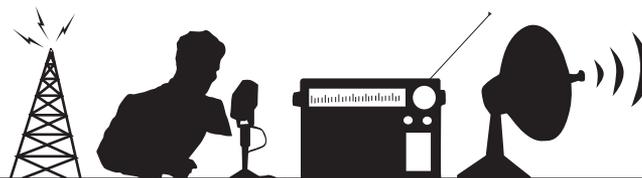
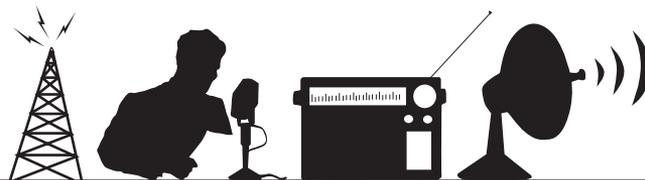




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Introduction

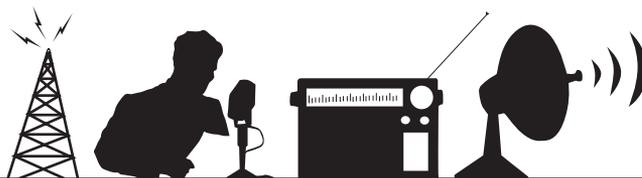
Can you picture life today without newspapers, televisions, or computers? Or without telephones, radios, or mail service? Could we get along without our modems and fax machines? And what about simple devices such as ballpoint pens? Where would we be without these handy little tools?

Humankind, of course, had none of these conveniences for centuries. Instead, it had to cope with the most primitive means at hand. Because there was no other way to relay information quickly, the Athenian runner Pheidippides had to run 140 miles in 490 B.C. to deliver a message to the Spartans. Because news traveled so slowly even in the 1800s, the Battle of New Orleans was fought fifteen days after the treaty ending the War of 1812 was signed. And because Samuel F. B. Morse had not yet invented his famous telegraph and was away on business at the time, he did not receive word of his first wife's death in 1825 until days after her funeral.

Everyday Life: Communication traces the evolution of communication from smoke signals to computers. It is not a history about how things work as much as a story of how achievements in communication have affected and changed the lives of people everywhere. It is a story that is both informative and interesting.

As with other books in Good Year's Everyday Life series, each chapter in *Everyday Life: Communication* concludes with activities designed to motivate and challenge students in all areas of the curriculum. Included, among others, are exercises dealing with critical thinking, vocabulary, math, geography, writing, and reading comprehension. Several puzzles are also provided for students' enjoyment.

Walter A. Hazen





Smoke Signals and Other Early Means

A smile. A nod. A wave of the hand. A shake of the head. A grimace. A laugh.

What are all of the above? They are some of the ways in which we convey our thoughts and feelings to others. They are, in short, simple means of communication.

The earliest communicators in America were the Indians. Their gestures and body signals led to the development of a sign language that enabled one tribe to communicate with another. This form of language developed out of necessity, for there were more than twenty-two separate languages spoken on the Great Plains alone.

The number of words and ideas expressed in Indian sign language is probably not known. A recent Boy Scout handbook lists more than 600, many of which were natural gestures. An open hand placed behind the ear meant “listen.” Rubbing the stomach with the palm of the hand indicated “hunger.”

A closed fist with the thumb pointing either toward or away from the communicator meant “me” and “you.” Such signs proved invaluable in Indian communications with white traders, trappers, and military personnel. (Similar signs were later made part of a sign language that was developed for deaf people.)

Indians added to their language of signs with vocal sounds. Imitations of the calls of owls, wolves, coyotes, and other animals conveyed certain meanings. So did whistle sounds made by blowing through the wing bones of large birds of prey.

Indians also communicated through fires and smoke signals. A war or hunting party returning from a successful outing might build a single fire on a high hill visible to their village. The inhabitants of the village knew that one column of smoke meant good news, and they acknowledged its receipt by building two fires of their own.

As you are no doubt aware, smoke signals were accomplished by waving a blanket over a fire. There is no proof, however, that such puffs of smoke stood for individual words. Instead, they expressed certain ideas and

Indians using smoke signals to convey a message. Smoke signals were one of the earliest forms of communication in North America.





concepts understood by all Indians in a particular area. They also communicated by drums and, after they obtained them from white traders, mirrors.

Indians never developed a system of written language. Some tribes did, however, communicate certain ideas through pictographs. Pictographs are pictures that represent signs or symbols. They are not to be confused with hieroglyphics, the form of picture writing used by the ancient Egyptians and some Indian groups of Latin America. A pictograph simply expressed an idea and could not be “read” like hieroglyphics. A picture of a foot, for example, might stand for walk or travel. Likewise, a drawing of a bow and arrow might represent war.

The blazing of trees was another early form of communication. First used by Native Americans and then imitated by settlers, blazed trees were America’s first “road signs.” Blazes, or notches, were cut into the bark of trees to mark new paths through forested areas. Sometimes the location of the blazes indicated which path or road to take to reach a certain destination. In Maryland, for example, a road that turned off to a church was marked by notches made near the ground. Stones arranged in patterns were also used to guide travelers along America’s earliest roadways.

In the days before printed materials, colonists could communicate only by letter and word of mouth. Early letter writing was quite different from letter writing today. Letters were not placed into envelopes but were instead folded and sealed with melted wax. The writer then stamped his or her personal seal into the wax to identify the sender. When the letter reached its destination, the recipient paid the postage. Letters were often left spread out on tables in inns and other places for people to look through and claim. You will learn more about early mail service in America in Chapter 3.

News for a village or town was often passed on by the town crier. The town crier was a gentleman who walked the streets and reported on events in a bellowing voice. Signaling his approach by beating a drum or ringing a bell, he would, in his capacity as local news anchor and weatherman, report on anything of interest or concern to the residents. Late at night he might be heard shouting something such as “Twelve o’clock and all’s well” or “Two o’clock and a light snow falls.” He

A town crier bellows out news of an event for all to hear. Judging from the behavior of the little girl in the foreground, the news must have been bad.





could even be expected to relay news of the coming and going of ships from England and elsewhere. Sometimes his messages spurred a whole town to action, such as when he reported on the disappearance of a child. Whether by day or night, his appearance was probably anticipated in the same way that we await the arrival of the mail carrier today.

News also reached the colonists by way of people passing through. Trappers, peddlers, and travelers might bring word of a storm or an epidemic in another town or colony. Settlers in remote areas were especially grateful for any news they received from travelers who stopped by for a brief stay.



Ringling the Liberty Bell atop Philadelphia's Independence Hall on July 4, 1776. Bells were used everywhere as an early means of communication.

Bells and gun shots were other means of early communication. The ringing of a bell could indicate a number of things: danger, the beginning of curfew, or a warning to residents that the town crier was about to make an important announcement. A prearranged code made it possible for everyone to understand the message being transmitted by the bell. (Today bells continue to serve as a means of communication. Church bells call people to worship. School bells inform students when it is time for classes to begin and end. Clock bells tell us the time. Doorbells

let us know that someone has come calling.)

Nowhere was communication by bell or gun shot more important than on the early frontier. With homes and settlements spread far apart, frontier people depended on a signal from a nearby blockhouse (small fort) to alert them of danger. When settlers heard the coded message of a bell or gun, they dropped what they were doing and hurried to safety inside the blockhouse walls.

Guns continued to transmit messages even on the last frontier, or the Wild West, as it is sometimes called. To alert distant homesteaders that the festivities surrounding a holiday such as the Fourth of July were about to begin, townspeople would often fire a large cannon that could be heard for miles around. The sound of the cannon told amusement-starved pioneers that it was time to drop all work and strike out for town and a day of fun.





Name _____ Date _____

Sentence or Fragment?

Here are 10 statements. Some are fragments, while others are complete sentences. On the line to the left of each, write **F** if the statement is a fragment or **S** if it is a complete sentence. Lines are provided for you to write complete sentences for those statements you mark as fragments.

Remember that fragments are statements that lack either a verb or a subject or do not express a complete thought.

1. _____ Smoke signals rising in the distance.

2. _____ Sending a message by fire.

3. _____ Some North American Indians used pictographs to express ideas.

4. _____ Notched trees often guided travelers along early trails.

5. _____ Stones arranged in a certain way.

6. _____ Letters at one time were folded and sealed with wax.

7. _____ Letters left spread out on tables in taverns and inns.

8. _____ The town crier announcing his news in a loud voice.

9. _____ Settlers welcomed news brought to them by travelers and others.

10. _____ The report of a gun warning settlers of approaching danger.

