





# DECODING SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE: FROM ICON TO UNDERSTANDING

This Learning Experience Organizer (LEO) was developed for Mindblue.com by Ryan R. Goble & Nicole L. Trackman using the artwork of Xi Bing v1.0 10.9.09

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Meet up with a partner and pair share translations. Make at least three notes below about things that you learned, disagreed about or found interesting.

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You and your partner can join with another pair in class. As a group of four please answer the following questions in the space below or on chart paper.

3. Make a chart with six symbols you group is POSITIVE they know the meaning of below. NOTE: Symbols cannot come from the first line of text.

SYMBOL	MEANING	KNOWLEDGE/STRATEGY THAT ALLOWED YOU TO DECODE MEANING

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4. What "reading" strategies did you use to decode the symbols above and the story as a whole? How did you make meanings? List at least five strategies your group used below.

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5. Make a list of four things from the story that your group still collectively has questions about.

QUESTIONS	READING STRATEGIES YOU MIGHT USE TO DISCOVER THE ANSWER



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6. List three things that surprised / interested you about the translation. Be sure to explain the reason for your choices.

TRANSLATION OF INTEREST/SURPRISE	REASON YOU FOUND THIS INTERESTING/SUPRISING

7. How do you think Bing gathered the icons to create this symbolic language? Explain your answer below in three to five sentences.

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8. Based on your knowledge and experience, how is "Book From The Ground" similar to traditional stories and how is it different? List two similarities, and two differences below:

REASONS SIMILAR TO TRADITIONAL STORIES	REASONS DIFFERENT TO TRADITIONAL STORIES

9. What do you think Bing's "icon language" tells us about modern culture? Make sure you explain your answer in 3-5 sentences.

10. What do you think Bing was trying to say/communicate beyond the literal story?

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As you read the passage below consider making notes, underlining things you find interesting or have questions about. Here is an excerpt from Xi Bing's artist's statement:

*This project first began with my collecting safety manuals from a number of airlines. In the past decade, I have spent countless hours in airports and aboard airplanes. The design of airport signs and airline safety manuals is based upon image recognition. Diagrams there are employed as the primary means of communication in an attempt to explain relatively complex matters with a minimum of words. It was this that truly fascinated me. Since about 1999, I have collected over one hundred safety cards, but until recently I had no clear goal in so doing. Then, in 2003, I noticed three small images on a pack of gum (they translate into please use your wrapper to dispose of the gum in a trashcan), and came to realize that in so far as icons alone can explain something simple, they can also be used to narrate a longer story. From that point on, through various channels, I began to collect and organize logos, icons, and insignia from across the globe, and I also began to research the symbols of expression employed by the specialized fields of mathematics, chemistry, physics, drafting, musical composition, choreography, and corporate branding, among others. In recent years, the expanding speed of the Internet and the widespread emergence of a language of computer icons have greatly increased the scale and complexity of this project. But the more this becomes the case, the more I am able to sense the significance of this work, about which I have had the following thoughts:*

*In 1627, the French thinker Jean Douet, in an essay titled "Proposal to the King for a Universal Script, with Admirable Results, Very Useful to Everyone on Earth," first suggested that Chinese was a potential model for an international language. The word "model" is important here because Douet does not limit this "universal script" to the form of Chinese characters per se. He instead focuses on the universal potential of the system of recognition upon which the Chinese language is based. Today, nearly four hundred years later, human communication has indeed evolved in the direction predicted by Douet. We have come to sense that traditional spoken forms are no longer the most appropriate method for communication. And, in response, great human effort has been concentrated on developing ways to replace traditional written languages with icons and images. For this reason, among others, humankind has entered the age of reading images.*

*Most languages take shape among a small group of people (a tribe or a village) sharing a similar set of vocalized expressions. As the scope of the group's activities expands, its language also develops into a regional mode of expression. The people's geographic expansion across multiple localities and political boundaries is also the millennia-long process of its language's growth. Today, spurred by a trend of internationalization, the world is contracting, creating the sense of a "global village." However, this huge "village" is distinct from the early villages out of which language first took shape: as citizens of the global village, we use a rich and varied range of dialects and often employ mutually incomprehensible systems of symbols to express information in written form. We must, however, live and work together (in the sense that we share information on a global scale). As a result, the inconvenience of language and miscommunication has become a significant burden in many of our lives. Our existing languages are based on geography, ethnicity, and culture (including all-powerful English), and all fall short. Written languages now face an entirely unprecedented challenge. Today, the age-old human desire for a "single script" has become a tangible need. This predicament requires a new form of communication better adapted to the circumstances of globalization. Only today can the implications of the Tower of Babel truly be revived.*

Mr. Bing's full statement can be found at [http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2007/automatic\\_update/subs\\_wrapper.php?section=xubing\\_interview.html](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2007/automatic_update/subs_wrapper.php?section=xubing_interview.html)

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11. Please answer the following prompts using passages from Mr. Bing's artist's statement...

One passage I had a question about was...	The reason/s I had a question about this passage...
One passage that really connected to my knowledge and experience was...	The reason/s this passage connected to my knowledge and experience was...
One passage I really disagreed with was...	The reason/s I disagreed with this passage was

12. How might the process of reading and translating *Book from the Ground* help you decode other symbolic systems, like a science text, math equation, a painting or the signs, symbols and language of a foreign culture?

13. If you could suggest to Mr. Bing one new icon to add to his collection what would that icon be and why.

DRAW YOUR ICON IN THE SPACE BELOW	MEANING OF ICON	REASON YOU WOULD ADD THIS ICON

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## SOME NOTES FOR THE INSTRUCTOR...

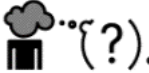





NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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• Parts of this study guide are an “undercover KWL.” Question #3 is “What do you know?” Question #5 is “What do you want to know?” Questions #6-12 are variations on “What I Learned.”

• We recommend having students take some individual time to decode the story before decoding in it in groups. This allows each individual time to process the story and bringing a richer mix of ideas to the group. To make sure students experience cognitive dissonance while interacting with the text we recommend you hand the LEO out in chunks.

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Recommended Chunks			Here are some possible responses to question #5
Chunk 1	pages 1-2	homework, can't use computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does  mean?</li> <li>• What is  ?</li> <li>• Dry cleaning in line 8?</li> <li>• What is  ?</li> <li>• Why does he seem to be thinking about laundry?</li> <li>• What does the  tell us?</li> <li>• Why all the clocks?</li> <li>•  Why is the cloud over his head?</li> <li>• Why does he offer gum twice?</li> <li>• Are they more than just friends? </li> <li>• Why does he throw away the gum so quickly?</li> </ul>
Chunk 2	Pages 3-4	in class	
Chunk 3	Pages 5-7	homework or in class	
Chunk 4	pages 8-9	suggested 10th-college only - homework or in class	
Here are some possible responses to question #4			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior knowledge of punctuation</li> <li>• Prior knowledge of flying</li> <li>• Past experiences / prior knowledge</li> <li>• Prior knowledge of everyday objects (                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prior knowledge of facial expressions</li> <li>• Reading text out loud</li> <li>• Built on basic knowledge of math symbols</li> <li>• Tried to group icons into words/phrases</li> <li>• Creative thinking / Thinking outside the box</li> <li>• Educated guesses based on context clues</li> </ul>			