A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Have you been using emojis, such as smiley faces, hearts or thumbs up, in almost every text message you send? Young people use them so much that teachers are complaining that their students have forgotten how to write properly.

Actually, pictures were the first form of writing. Over 35,000 years ago, there were paintings on cave walls describing adventures in hunting. Much later, pictograms – pictures of objects – were used in ancient Egypt, where they developed into a picture-writing language called hieroglyphics. In modern times, pictures are still used to express ideas in a way that everyone can understand, such as the red hand on stop signs.

So when were emoticons born? The first emoticon, a smiley face, was first used just after email began in the 1980s. People began to use punctuation marks* to show emotions. Years later, in 1998, a Japanese artist named Shigetaka Kurita created emojis, which are pictures of faces and objects. Many show subjects like the weather, forms of transportation or technology. Now, billions of people around the world are using emojis.

Why do we love emojis? They’re fun and they also fill an important need. When we talk face-to-face, our tone of voice, the expression on our face and our body language all help us to be understood. But when we write short messages, all of these clues are gone. The result is that people can easily misunderstand our message. A laughing emoji can let the other person know that we’re just joking.

Today there are over 2,800 emojis, and their number is increasing each year. Over 90% of people use emojis regularly online. Many people say that they find it easier to express their feelings with an emoji than with words. Does all this mean we are forgetting how to write, using pictures instead of written language? In some ways. But in modern times, when we communicate by message more than we do face-to-face, a picture really is worth a thousand words.

* punctuation marks / علامات ترقيم

Did You Understand?

1 Complete the sentence. (lines 1-4)
A thumbs up is an example of

2 Answer the questions. (lines 5-16)
1. Why were pictures used in the past?

2. Why do we use pictures today?

3 What do we learn in lines 11-16? Tick (✓) the TWO correct answers.
   a. the history of emoticons
   b. the reason Kurita created emojis
   c. why people used emoticons
   d. how emojis became famous around the world
   e. which emoji is the most popular

4 What problem and what solution is mentioned in lines 17-22?
   Problem:

   Solution:

5 What two facts does the writer give to show that the use of emojis is growing? (lines 23-25)
   1.
   2.

6 What is the writer’s opinion?
   a. Students shouldn’t use emojis at school.
   b. Emojis help us communicate our feelings.
   c. We need to develop more emojis in modern times.
   d. People should communicate more face-to-face.

7 What is your favorite emoji? Why?