

Conflict Resolution in Schools

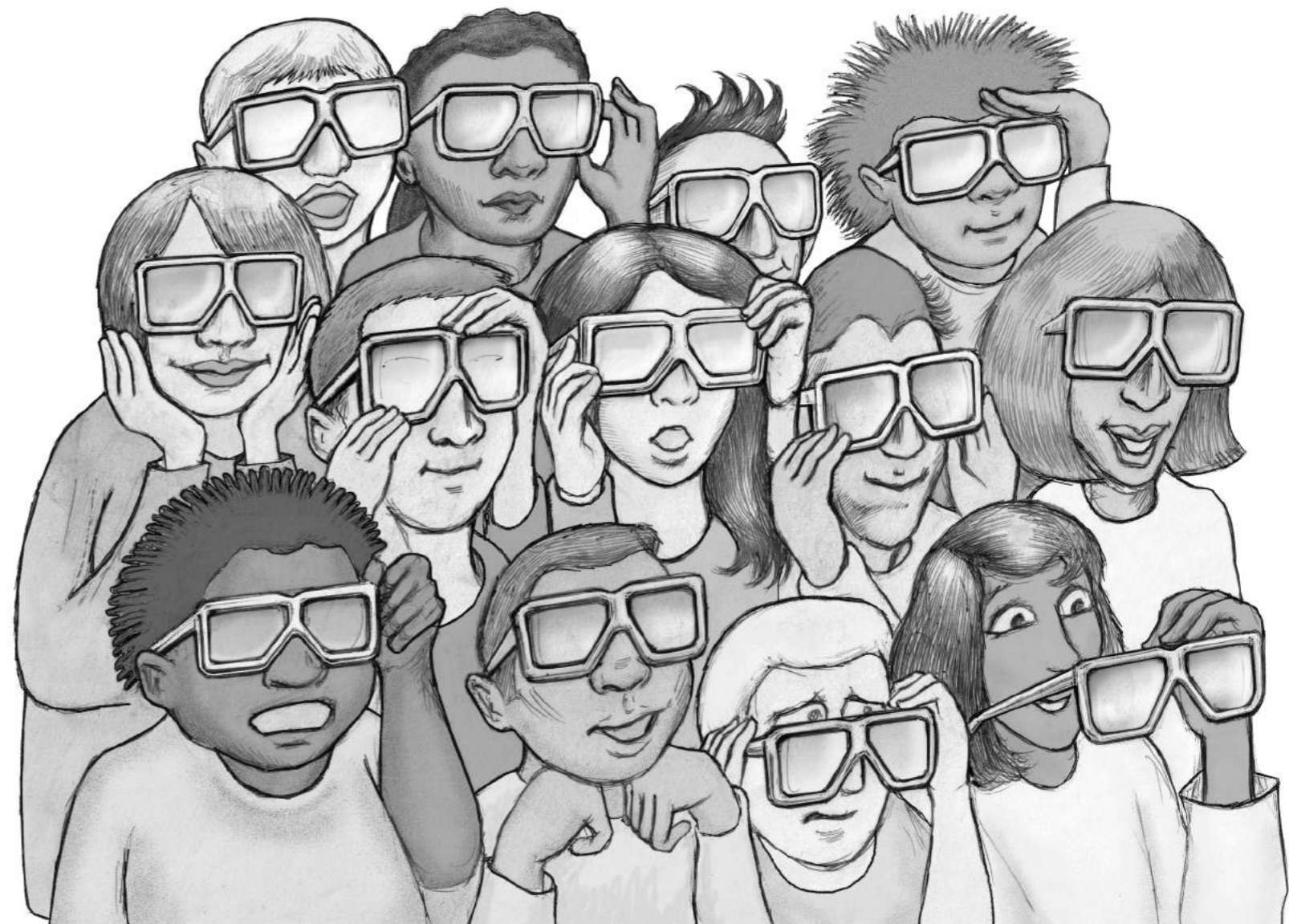
Guide for Educators in South Africa

Booklet 3

PERCEPTION

Topics in this booklet:

- The role of perception in conflict resolution
- The perceptions of other people are just as valid for them as our own are for us



Conflict Resolution in Schools

Notes

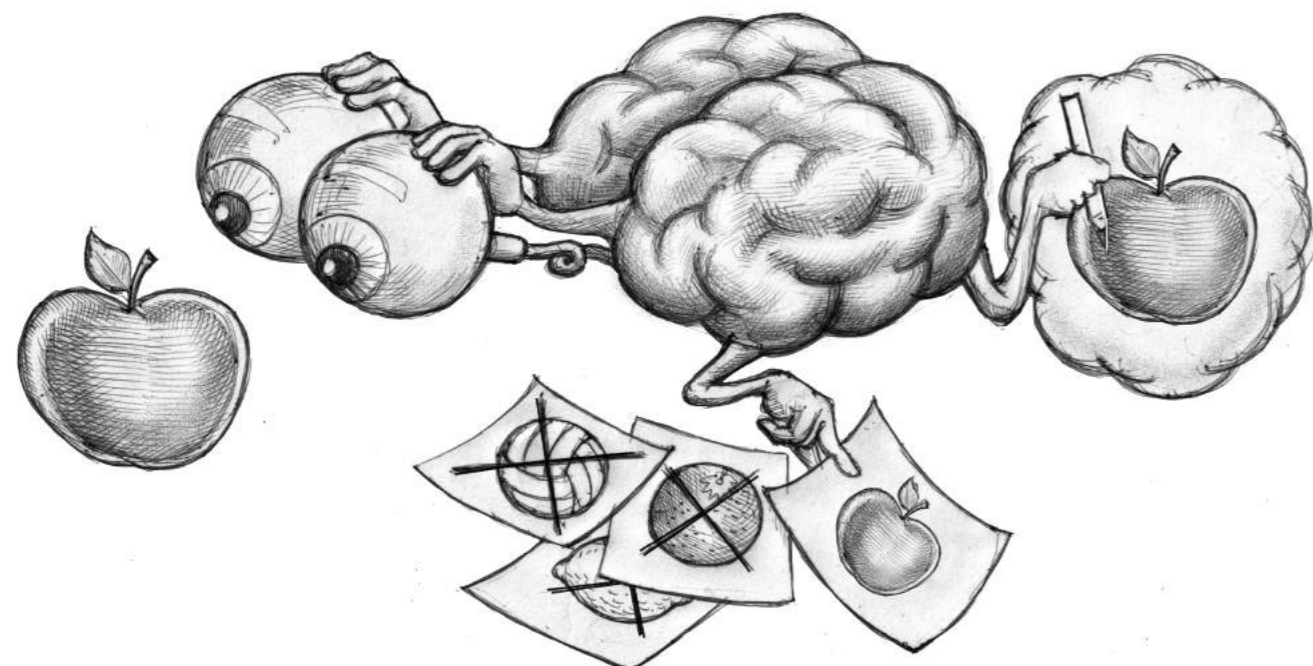
Guide for Educators in South Africa

Booklet 3 - Perception

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Notes

Background:

Perception

Definition

In psychology and the cognitive sciences, perception is the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting, and organising sensory information.

Background

People as individuals view the world from their own point of view, which is influenced by their own culture, religion, socio-economic environment, values and ethics, personality, temperament, upbringing, and past experiences.

As we move around the world, we create a (simplistic) model of how the world works. Whilst we sense the objective world, our sensations map to our model, which is updated as we acquire new information.

Values/ethics and attitudes can be passed on through generations in families and societies. But they are also influenced by current experiences, such as education, advertising and the media. Peer pressure also plays a large role – not only at school, but also in the work and home environment.

All of these influences create ‘cultural filters’ through which we view the world. These ensure that the ‘world view’ of each one of us is different and unique. This is similar to the different perceptions of the world gained when individuals view a panorama wearing different shaded sunglasses: The basic details are the same, but the shades of colour influence the whole scene and mood.

People often believe that their own perception is the ‘right one’, simply because it is the only one they know. They also believe that everyone else sees things exactly as they do. They are wrong on both counts.

Conflicts can be created or exacerbated by certain perceptions and judgements. It is easy to misunderstand how another person is thinking and feeling just by their facial expressions and actions. Similarly, words can be misunderstood in conflicts because the words used may have different meanings for both parties.

The saying ‘you can’t judge a book by its cover’ is appropriate here. In the same way, you cannot judge a person by their outward appearances – as this judgement would be based not on that person’s individual personality and qualities, but on our own past experiences, prejudices, stereotyping and bigotry.

This means that it is vital to accept that the perceptions of other people are just as valid for them as our own are for us.

In conflict resolution it is crucial that different perceptions are understood and valued. Without this, there can be no progress towards conflict resolution. There are always two



sides to every conflict, and each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different scenarios.

Resources

Websites:

Wikipedia Encyclopaedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception>

Search for Common Ground, Washington DC

http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_distinctions.html

The Beyond Intractability Project, University of Colorado

<http://www.beyondintractability.org/resources/>

Publications:

Title: Managing Conflict - With Confidence (Primary and Secondary, Australia)

Authors: Clare Heaton & Maureen Lynch

Publisher: Pearson Longman, 2003
ISBN 01-74091-059-1

Class Lesson 1:

Trick Pictures

Objectives

To help learners to understand: -

- That different people often have different perceptions of the same image or situation, and that they often – incorrectly – think that their own perception is the only right one;
- The importance of different perceptions in conflict resolution, and the need to ensure that different perspectives are clarified, understood and valued.

Age/level

Appropriate for ages 8 and above

Duration

Fifteen minutes

Materials

'Trick picture' examples (see on next page)
(Either one photocopy per learner or on overhead transparencies)

Procedure

Ask learners to say what they see in each picture.

After their first response ask: 'Do you see anything else?'

Then: 'Do you need to turn the page to see anything else?'

Then: 'What do you see now?'

Encourage learners to help one another to see different perspectives of each picture.

Ask the learners for their thoughts on why people see different images?

Compare this to different perceptions of the world.

See 'Issues to Explore' for further points to discuss.

Issues to Explore

See the background information on perception.

In the case of visual perception, some people can actually see the perceptual shift in their mind's eye. Others who are not 'picture thinkers' may not necessarily perceive the 'shape-shifting' as their world changes. One image can give rise to a number of perceptions. If an object has no grounding in a person's experience, the person may not even perceive it.

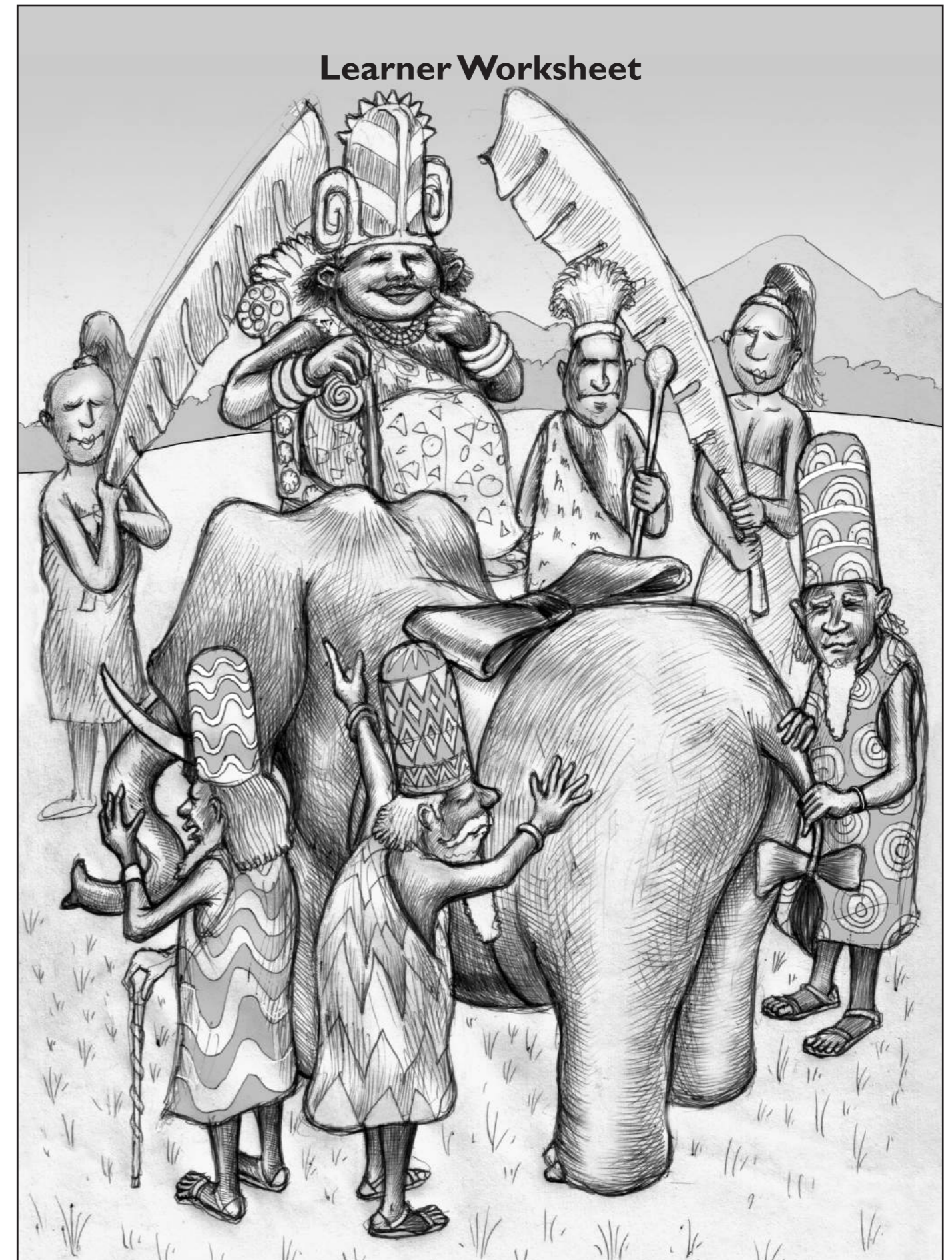
It is interesting that once a person can see one picture it becomes very difficult to perceive another. The original picture is now imprinted on their memory and senses, and becomes difficult to dislodge. This is the same as our 'world views' against which we measure and evaluate the world.

People often believe that their perception is the 'right one' – and not just as regards the pictures - simply because it is the only one they know. They also believe that everyone else sees things exactly as they do. As the trick pictures illustrate, they are frequently wrong!

Understanding different perceptions is a vital part of conflict resolution. There are two sides to every conflict, and each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different interpretations. Drawing out these perceptions, and taking them into account is necessary in order to find a solution that suits both parties (a 'win-win' solution).

It was unheard of for citizens to steal from the King. So the King scratched his head and thought aloud:

"Well, well, well – I wonder what happened to my presents?" And to this day he is still wondering...



Class Lesson 3:

The Blind King and the Elephant

Objectives

To help learners to understand that: -

- Looking at a situation from just one point of view can severely limit understanding of the real picture
- In conflict resolution, each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different scenarios. It is necessary to look at all perspectives before a satisfactory ('win-win') solution can be found

Age/level

Appropriate for ages 8 and above

Duration

Fifteen minutes

Materials

- Story (see below)
- Picture of the blind king and the elephant (see below)

Procedure

Read the story about the blind king and the elephant.

Use the following questions (and the cartoon picture) to discuss the story with the class.

1. Why did the wise elders think the elephant was a rope, a hosepipe and a wall?
2. How could the wise elders have understood what the reality of the situation was?
3. Then broaden out the discussion to explore how this relates to conflict.

See below for 'Issues to Explore' in the discussion.

Issues to Explore

See the background information on perception.

There are two sides to every conflict, and each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different scenarios. It is important to examine the whole picture, in order to obtain a real understanding of the situation.

Part of understanding the problem, and the reasons for any conflict, is drawing out different perceptions. Then these can be taken into account in order to find a solution that suits both parties (a 'win-win' solution).

Story:

The Blind King and the Elephant

Many years ago in a distant African kingdom, there lived a blind king called King Serama, who ruled over his people. They were blind too. Even the cats and dogs were blind. Nobody knew why the kingdom was blind: it had always been that way.

Every year when the King had a birthday, everyone celebrated and had a good time. That was until the year of 1650, when it was the King's 18th birthday. In those days, the 18th birthday was a really special occasion and people around the world paid their respects to the King on his 'coming of age', and sent him all sorts of presents. Many rich monarchs of other countries sent the king magnificent and valuable presents, and he was amazed. He received horses, cows, diamonds and gold. He was such a happy King!

That was until the queen of a distant Indian kingdom sent him a present he could not identify. He was intrigued...

So he sent for his three wisest elders, who had travelled the world and knew all its secrets. He asked them if they could tell him what the present was.

The first wise elder reached out and touched the present and said: "The Queen has sent you a hosepipe. This may be because it is often hot and dry in India, as it is here in Africa?"

The blind King said: "How strange – what a funny thing to send me on my 18th birthday?"

The second wise elder then touched the present and said: "The Queen has sent you a wall. This may be because in India, as in Africa, high walls are needed to keep their monarchs in safety?"

The blind King said: "How very strange..."

The third wise elder then felt the present and said: "The Queen has sent you a rope. This may be because rope tricks are popular in India?"

Well, said the blind King, I know you are supposed to be grateful for your birthday presents, but I can't help thinking that the Queen must be mad to send me such presents all the way from India? But maybe they will come in useful one day, so we will just leave them there until we need them."

So everybody went off to the palace for an enormous feast: eating, drinking and dancing. They had such fun that the present was completely forgotten.

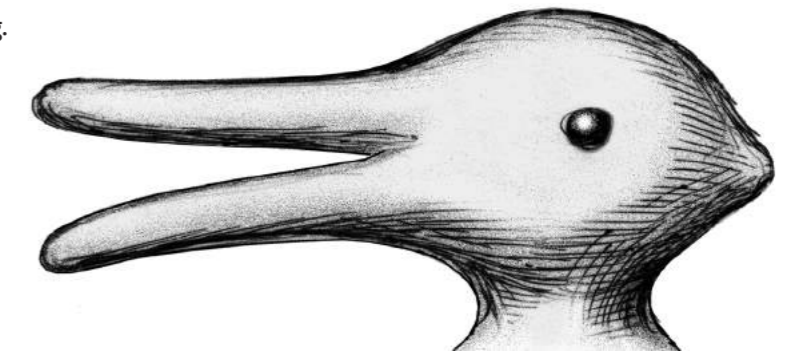
The present wandered off to the nearby jungle and lived happily ever after.

One day later the blind King needed some rope to do a rope trick with. So he asked somebody to go and fetch his birthday rope.

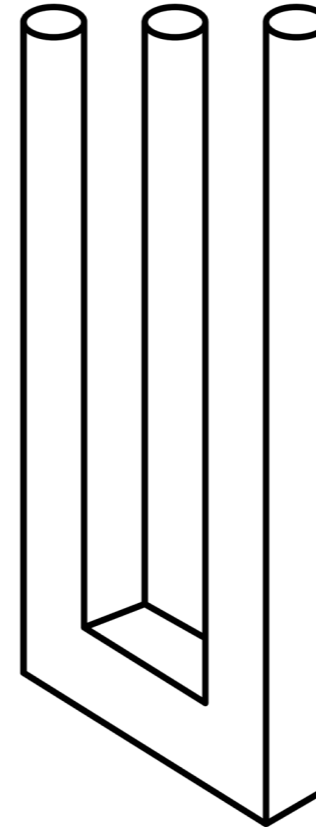
When the person got there, the rope had disappeared. So had the wall, and so had the hosepipe...

Learner Worksheet

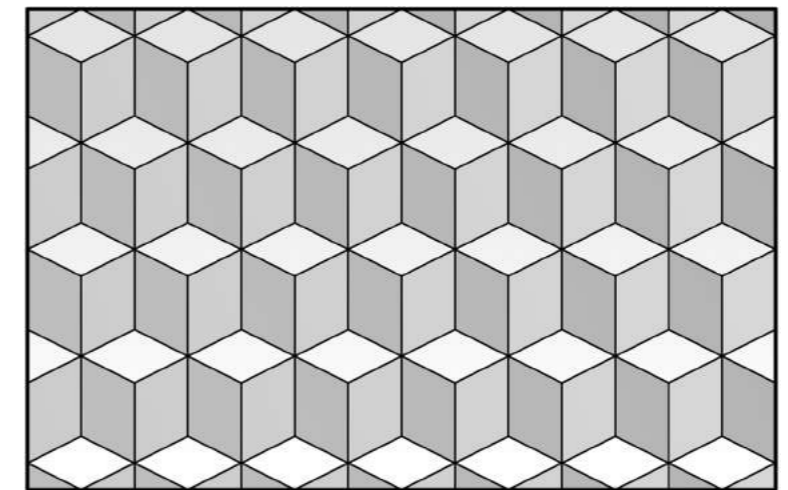
Images can sometimes have more than one meaning, or can be visually confusing. Here are some examples:



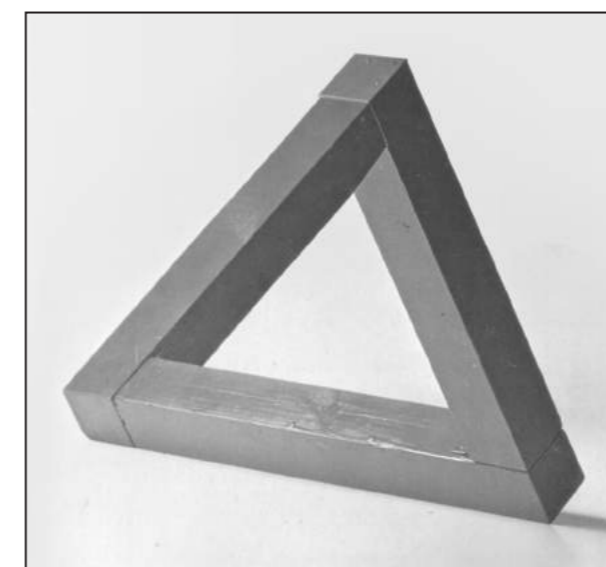
1. Is this picture above a drawing of a duck, or is it a rabbit?



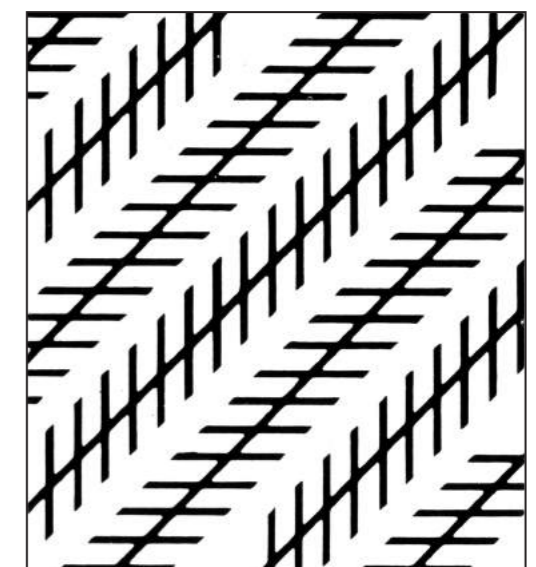
2. Is the above image a solid frame, or three vertical poles? Or both?



3. Are the cubes in the picture above seen looking down from above, or looking upwards from below?



4. Is the three-dimensional triangular object in the above photograph at all possible?



5. Do the diagonal lines in the above image run parallel to each other?

Class Lesson 2:

What Do You See?

Objectives

To help learners to understand that: -

- They may see and feel differently from another person about the same picture, place or event
- In conflict resolution, each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different scenarios

Age/level

Appropriate for ages 8 and above

Duration

Fifteen minutes

Materials

- Picture (see below)
(Either one large picture at the front of the class or an overhead transparency)

Procedure

Ask learners to work in pairs, so they can compare and contrast perceptions.

Each learner should look at the picture and then write down:

- What they see in the picture
- What they feel about the picture, or what they think people in the picture would be feeling

Tell the learners there are no right or wrong answers.



Images can be subjected to a number of different interpretations, especially when viewed out of their original context.

For example:

The person seated on the left is:

- a) A homeless person?
- b) A criminal?
- c) A worker taking his lunch break in the park?

Correct answer is (c)

Ask them not to let their partner see what they are writing.

After about a few minutes of working individually, ask the learners to compare their answers with those of their partner. Let them discuss the differences first, and explain these to each other. Then, discuss the similarities.

After the learners have discussed in their pairs, open up the discussion to the class. See below for 'Issues to Explore' in the discussion.

Issues to Explore

See the background information on perception.

Did the learners see the same things?

Did they feel the same way about the picture?

The way in which we each view the world will differ depending on our own personalities and past experiences. A person used to living in a rural, countryside environment may feel an inner city to be a noisy, dangerous and threatening place - whereas a town dweller may feel comfortable in a busy city, used to the buzz and noise. Similarly, extroverts may enjoy the city, whereas introverts may prefer the peace and quiet of the countryside.

In a conflict, people see the problem from different perspectives. There are as many perspectives as there are people! Also, people feel differently about a conflict. Some may enjoy the cut and thrust of a disagreement, some see it as a challenge or a battle to be won. Others enjoy harmony, and feel upset by any conflict.

Talking often helps people to understand different perceptions. This is the first step towards resolving any conflict.

There are two sides to every conflict, and each side may be looking at the same situation but seeing, hearing, thinking and feeling vastly different scenarios. Drawing out these perceptions, and taking them into account is necessary in order to find a solution that suits both parties (a 'win-win' solution).

Learner Worksheet

Use either one large picture at the front of the class or an overhead transparency

Use an image such as a busy, overcrowded city-centre picture e.g. Downtown Johannesburg amid the skyscrapers, or any other busy African city - the busier and more hectic, the better. If the picture includes an event e.g. a crime or something similar, so much the better!

