mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “How were emojis created?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi, it's Doug! So my friend has these pillows—these smiley face things that people send each other on their smartphones—you might know they're called emojis.

Well, someone named Pedro has a question about emojis. Let's give him a call.

[Video Call]
- Hi, Doug!
- Hi, Pedro!
- I have a question for you. How were emojis created?
- That's a great question.

You might have seen emojis before—you know, these little smiley faces people use on phones? And they're not always smiling like some of them show silly faces. And some are like a hand, giving a thumbs up. Some are even animals, almost anything you can think of. But Pedro asked such an interesting question. His question was, "Who created emojis?" And that's the thing. Emojis were created? You might not have thought about that before, but just like a lot of things in our lives, emojis didn't always exist. They weren't always a thing. Someone had to create them. So who created them and why? Well, it turns out emojis were invented back in the late 1990s when computers looked more like this, and your parents were probably kids then. Emojis were invented by this person, a man named Shigetaka Kurita. Shigetaka is from the country of

Japan. In fact, the word emoji comes from Japanese. In Japanese, emoji means something like picture-word. Now, as an inventor, the reason Shigetaka Kurita came up with the idea of emojis is that he was trying to solve a problem. Huh, now what do you think it was? What problem do you think emojis solve?

Well, imagine if there were no emojis and a person went to send their friend a message. For example, imagine someone asks their friend, "Want to work on our project after school today?" And then, the friend responds like this: "Sure." But wait, what does she mean, sure? I guess that means she wants to work on a project. Think about it though, does she mean, sure! Like she's excited about it? Or, sure, like eh, she's not really wanting to do this. Typing or writing a message to someone, it might not be clear how that person feels. Compare that to when someone is talking to you in person. Like, you can tell here, this person is excited or happy. You can usually see and hear how excited someone is. But when you write or type something, you can't hear someone's voice and you can't see their face, so Shigetaka Kurita invented emojis to solve this problem. Emojis help people share how they're feeling when writing or typing. Another name for that is what we call tone. Tone isn't what you're saying, but how you're saying it. When you're speaking you give tone to your words by doing things like changing your voice and your facial expressions. You do things like smiling to show you're happy about something. Or maybe doing this when you're nervous about something. Or frowning like this when you're mad. But when you're writing or typing, the tone can get lost. When someone reads what you wrote, they might hear your words in their head with a totally different tone than what you meant. Emojis help solve this problem. They can show how you're feeling. Like if you write sure and you include a smiley face emoji when you send it, then someone will know that you mean you're excited. And there are emojis for just about any feeling you have. Like an emoji for when you

feel shy. An emoji for when you feel angry. There's even an emoji for those times that you're laughing so hard that you cry. And emojis have become really popular. When they were first invented there were only 200 emojis, all of them, really simple emojis in black and white. But now there are over 1,000 emojis, colorful and detailed, covering all kinds of different feelings.

So, in summary, emojis didn't always exist. They were invented by someone, an inventor who wanted to solve the problem of sharing how we're feeling over text. Now there are over 1,000 emojis used by people all over the world.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Pedro, for asking it.