Young Man:Hmmm… my girlfriend wants to have a date.She sent me all these emojis…How do I respond? Hmmm.

How ‘bout this?…

(typing sounds)

Okay… she’s responding…

(Phone biips)

Shrug, kiss face, heart, broken heart? Wait, what… What just happened?

Wait, what does this even mean?

Lee Francis IV: It means communication can be difficult, but with the help of Indigi-Genius, you can learn more about how Indigenous People have been communicating effectively for thousands of years. And how they’ve been able to transmit ideas, over short and long distances using incredible methods. And you’ll also understand how we still use these traditional technologies today, in our modern communication methods. All of this you’ll learn, and more, here on Indigi-Genius…right after this commercial break!

(awkward silence)

♪ ♪

Lee Francis IV: For hundreds of years, Indigenous people have developed sophisticated methods to communicate. Given the number of nations with language differences, and Tribes, and the distances across the United States, and around the world, it was and continues to be important, for people to be able to understand each other. The necessities of trade, defense and general human connections have always been an access point to deeper understandings of Indigenous communities. From interpersonal communication, to long distance communication, the fundamental building blocks of human interaction have been present with Indigenous communities, Tribes and Nations, for millennia. But how does that act of communication actually work? It breaks down like this. For any communication, there is a Sender and a Receiver. The Sender determines a need, thought or feeling they would like to send to the Receiver. The message is then Coded. This can be through various means, spoken or written. The Receiver recognizes the message and goes through a process of Decoding the message and then makes meaning out of the message. Then they switch roles and the process begins again. When you are face to face, this is not so much of a problem. But what happens when you have to communicate over long distances? Well, let’s set it on fire! No, not for real! But, fire has been a major method of long-distance communication for thousands of years. Signal fires, for example, have been used to relay important events across miles and miles of land. And, as many know, the use of smoke signals is embedded in American popular culture. But those puffs of smoke were coded and decoded throughout the ages and carry complex and significant understandings for those that could understand them. Even hand signals could be seen at long distances, which would be used to relay more complicated messages.

Of course, there are many other ways to communicate needs and necessities. Maps and marks, art and sound, music and storytelling, are all ways in which Indigenous people across the globe have found ways to pass on important cultural traditions and, of course, yield the basic necessities. Even in times of duress, these systems of communication have been and continue to be embedded in the fundamental understandings of Indigenous Peoples. That is why so many traditional practices and languages, once on the verge of extinction, have been making slow and steady progress back into the world.

When I was very little I remember seeing my grandma at a community feast day. She didn’t speak a lot, but she found ways to communicate simply through her eyes and intonations. It was only years later that I realized how profound her communication and conversations were. Although Indigenous people didn’t invent communication, the ways in which traditional languages and traditional methods have continued to evolve and adapt, throughout this world- wide communication network, further demonstrate how Indigenous communication is not simply an act of Sender and Receiver but rather something deeper and more intuitive for many Indigenous peoples and communities. I will say, though, nothing beats an old-fashioned smile. And those smiles are on display, each and every day, here on Indigi-Genius!