

Is Seeing Believing?

INTRODUCTION

How can we know that anything is 'true'? Can we trust our senses?

Explain that some people, wisely perhaps, will not believe anything unless they see it for themselves. What happens though, when you can't trust what you see?

ACTIVITY

Show students the optical illusion, left. What do they see: two faces or a vase?

Explain that they may have seen such illusions before, but have they realised the point?

Explain that such illusions demonstrate that what we see is *interpreted* by us. We look for things that we recognise and this is why we are so easy to fool. Magicians on the TV know that the hand can move quicker than the eye and are able to create illusions that seem impossible.



Ask the students to:

- describe to the person next to them, an illusion or magic trick they have seen or heard of.
- say how do they think the trick was done, or how the brain was fooled.

Get a few examples from the whole group, then show them this image:



What do they see first, 'GOOD' or 'EVIL'?

ACTIVITY

Ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- *What do such illusions as these make you feel about the world around you?*
- *Is the world better or worse than it sometimes appears?*

Point out that many religions and philosophies say that everything we experience is a kind of illusion, or at least, falls short of what is ultimately 'real'.

ACTIVITY

Show them an image of a Hindu god such as this one:



Hopefully, they will recognise Ganesha, but ask them to reflect on the idea that, for Hindus, there is more to the image of Ganesha than meets the eye. Ask them to:

- reflect on what this image may be symbolising;
- share ideas with the whole group.

Encourage students to comment on possible interpretations, such as:

- elephant head = great intelligence
- elephant trunk = great strength but also finesse
- lotus flower = enlightenment
- hatchet = cutting off of past karma when enlightenment is reached
- snare / noose = the trap of material possessions
- dish of sweets = how sweet the inner self may be
- hand raised with palm out = sign of blessing
- mouse / rat = the importance of all creatures, whatever their size (or a symbol of obstacles to be overcome).

CONCLUSION

Ask students for ideas on where people 'rush to judgement' on first impressions that later turn out to be wrong.