

Talking in Code

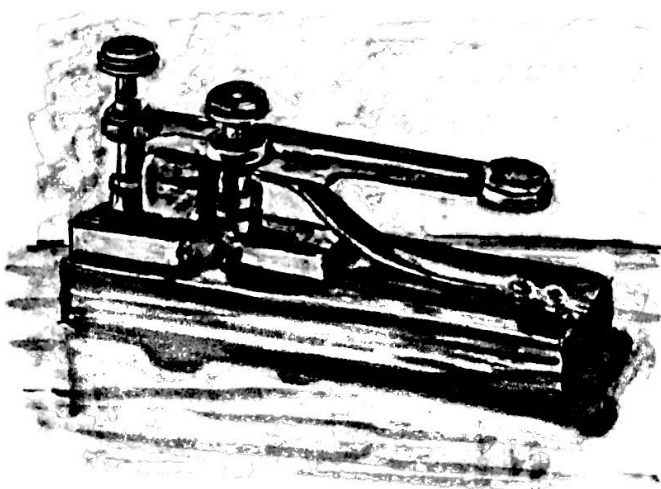
Have you ever talked to friends using a secret code?

¹ Before telephones came along, most people communicated over long distances by mail. However, another invention came just before the telephone that allowed long-distance messages to be sent just as quickly: the electrical telegraph. It was not able to transmit actual spoken words, but the telegraph could send coded signals along an electrical wire. These signals, called *Morse code* after one of the inventors of the telegraph, were then translated back into words at the receiving end.

² Samuel Morse, a famous artist in the early 1800s, was also interested in electricity, one of the newest discoveries of that time. During the 1830s, Morse worked with another inventor, Alfred Vail, to develop a way of using electricity for communication.

³ They devised a simple system in which electricity was used to create short and long sounds that would travel through wires. These two sounds could be grouped in different ways to symbolize letters, numbers, and punctuation marks. For instance, three short sounds, or dots, would equal the letter *s*, and three long sounds, or dashes, would equal the letter *o*. The words *Morse code* would look like this when using the dot and dash system:

--- --- ··· ··· · -·-·- -·-·- -·-·- ·
M O R S E C O D E



⁴ On May 24, 1844, Morse and Vail sent their first long-distance message. It was transmitted from Baltimore, Maryland, and received in Washington, D.C. This demonstration was a breakthrough for communication technology and caused telegraph wires to be run across the nation.

⁵ As more and more cities were connected with electrical wires, people were able to communicate instantly over great distances. Telegraph operators became very important people in the community because they were trained to write and translate Morse code messages. Using only dots, dashes, and pauses in between, the operator could tap out a message. The operator at the other end would interpret the signals and translate them back into written words.

⁶ Morse code is a versatile method of communication. Messages can be sent in Morse code using sound, light, and even radio signals. In fact, Morse code has been used for more than 160 years, longer than any other code in history. Although the military and other government agencies no longer use it, amateur radio operators still regularly communicate with Morse code. One of the main reasons is that dot and dash signals can be understood even when a signal is very weak due to interference or distance.

⁷ Another reason is that Morse code allows people who speak different languages to communicate. Many words and phrases in Morse code are abbreviated, similar to the way you might use shorthand like *LOL* (laughing out loud) or *BTW* (by the way) when you are online. For example, *CUL* stands for "see you later" and *TU* stands for "thank you." People from many different cultures learn these codes, regardless of their native language. All of a sudden, they have a common language to talk to the world!

Write **F** before the sentences that are facts. Write **O** before the sentences that are opinions.

1. ____ Messages can be sent in Morse code using sound, light, and radio signals.
2. ____ Morse code allows people who speak different languages to communicate.
3. ____ More people should learn to use Morse code today.
4. ____ On May 24, 1844, Morse and Vail sent their first long-distance message.
5. ____ Morse code is a simple system to learn.
6. On the lines below, write the words *come see* in Morse code using the information from the selection.

7. In paragraph 7, what does the word *abbreviated* mean?

8. You can send messages in Morse code using sound, _____, or radio signals.

9. In paragraph 6, the author says that Morse code is a versatile method of communication. What support does he or she give for this statement?
