

There's More Than Meets the Eye

(DOUG and EDDIE enter; DOUG sets EDDIE on his knee. There is an easel with seven charts to DOUG's left.)

DOUG: Good evening. Eddie and I have a real treat for you. We're going to look at some optical illusions. (*To Eddie*) Isn't that right?

EDDIE: I guess so.

DOUG: I thought we could call this "There's More Than Meets the Eye."

(DOUG reveals Chart #1: the title in bold lettering.)

DOUG: (*To Eddie*) Kind of a catchy title, don't you think?

EDDIE: Uh huh.

DOUG: But before we can understand illusions, we have to understand the eye. Tell me, Eddie...

EDDIE: (*warily*) What?

DOUG: Do you know how the eye works?

EDDIE: I think so. Light hits the eye, then the

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optic nerve, then goes on to the brain. Right?

DOUG: (*Laughs indulgently.*) Well, maybe this chart will clear things up for you.

(DOUG reveals Chart #2: a diagram showing light entering the eye and traveling to the brain.)

DOUG: As you can see, light enters the eye, then, traveling through what we call the “optic nerve,” proceeds to the proper area of the brain.

EDDIE: Well, that’s what I said.

DOUG: Uh huh. And when something goes wrong, the result is an illusion. Let me give you an analogy. Eddie...

EDDIE: What?

DOUG: Have you ever heard a sound that you thought was far away, and then found it was right in the next room?

EDDIE: No.

DOUG: And you probably said, “My ears must be playing tricks on me,” right?

EDDIE: Well...

DOUG: Well, the eye can play those tricks too, except visually. Let’s take a look at our first example.

(DOUG reveals Chart #3: a very long arrow and a very short arrow.)

DOUG: Now, which of these arrows would you say is longer?

EDDIE: Well, I would say the top one, but there's a trick, right?

DOUG: No, there's no trick. The top arrow is much longer than the bottom one. If we had a ruler, we could measure them, and find the exact difference.

EDDIE: I don't think that's necessary.

DOUG: No, probably not. But watch what happens when I simply reverse the chart. (*Does so.*) See? Now the bottom arrow is longer. It's remarkable how a simple change in orientation can change your entire perceptual framework.

EDDIE: It's not remarkable; it's just upside down!

DOUG: (*gently*) You know, Eddie, sometimes the simplest things in nature are the most magical of all.

EDDIE: (*grimly*) All right.

DOUG: And I think our second illusion is another case in point. It concerns the phenomenon of figure and ground.

(DOUG *reveals Chart #4: a stick figure of a man.*)

DOUG: Wouldn't you say this little man is standing stock still?

EDDIE: I guess so.

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DOUG: Yet watch what happens when we move the background which supports him. (*Moves chart up and down.*) See? It looks like he's jumping.

EDDIE: Well, in a way.

DOUG: That's the same principle that's involved in our third illusion.

(DOUG *reveals Chart #5: a stick figure in an elevator.*)

DOUG: If you're traveling up in an elevator, and you also jump up, you won't get there any faster, even though subjectively it seems that you would.

EDDIE: That's not really an illusion, is it? That's more like a physics thing or something.

DOUG: Uh huh. Let's move on to our fourth example.

(DOUG *reveals Chart #6: a crudely drawn circle.*)

DOUG: As you can see, this circle appears to have been drawn with a compass, but it was actually done freehand. It's what we might call a visual anomaly.

EDDIE: It doesn't look like it was drawn with a compass! It doesn't even look like it was done by an adult!

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DOUG: Well, it's the best I could do freehand.

EDDIE: Why didn't you use a compass?

DOUG: Don't you see, Eddie? The whole point is that it was done freehand, and not with a compass.

EDDIE: Well, yeah, but...

DOUG: For our fifth and final illusion, let's return to our familiar little man.

(DOUG *reveals Chart #7*: a stick figure with two heads.)

DOUG: Look — our eye tells us he has two heads, but our brain tells us that's impossible. When the eye and the brain are in conflict in this way, the result is an optical illusion.

EDDIE: That's not an illusion either! None of these are! They're all completely pointless!

DOUG: Well, it's hard coming up with illusions. I'd never done it before; I didn't know it would be so tricky.

EDDIE: Couldn't you get some out of a book or something?

DOUG: That would be plagiarism. That would be setting you a very bad example.

EDDIE: I don't think your pointless drawings set a very good example.

DOUG: We can discuss that later. (*To the*

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audience.) So, as you can see, the eye can be a mischievous ally indeed. And it's a good thing to keep in mind. Whether you're savoring a fine piece of art, or simply being yourself, remember: there's more than meets the eye. (*To Eddie*) Do you have anything to add?

EDDIE: No, I don't have anything to add.

DOUG: I hope you've enjoyed our little demonstration.

EDDIE: (*dourly*) Uh huh.

DOUG: Once again, I'm Doug Skinner, and this is Eddie Gray. Thank you very much. (*Exit.*)

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