Can apes learn human language? Sue Savage-Rumbaugh thinks so.

For more than 25 years, she's been conducting language studies with bonobos, primates closely related to humans. She's developed a unique form of communication with her simian counterparts using a set of geometric shapes that represent words in English. The apes she works with are able to convey objects, emotions, and actions by pointing to any of hundreds of symbols on a lexigram keyboard.

To see how an ape can communicate on our terms, explore the lexigram symbols below. You can hear Savage-Rumbaugh describe her language studies at length in an audio slide show on the NOVA Web site.

For more on bonobos and what they might teach us about ourselves, visit our Web site at http://www.pbs.org/nova/bonobos

Lexigram images courtesy of Sue Savage Rumbaugh / Great Ape Trust of Iowa