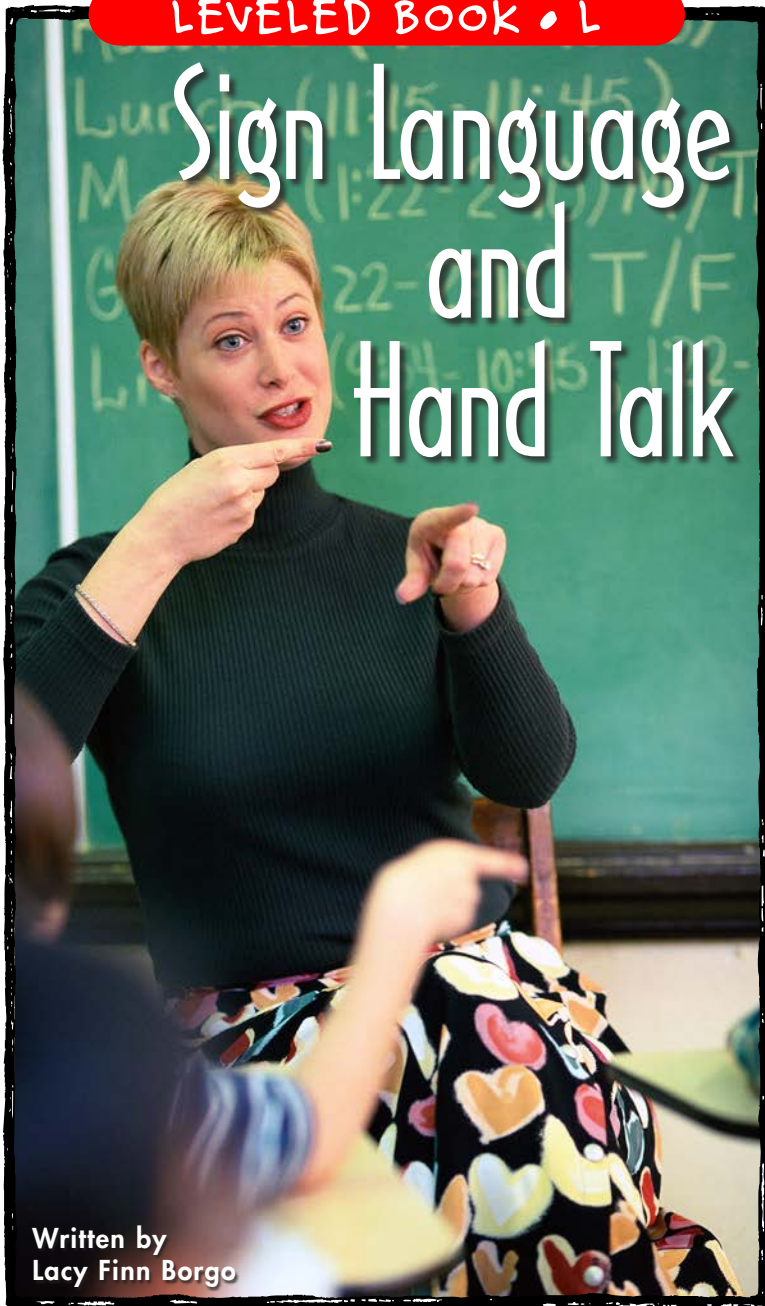


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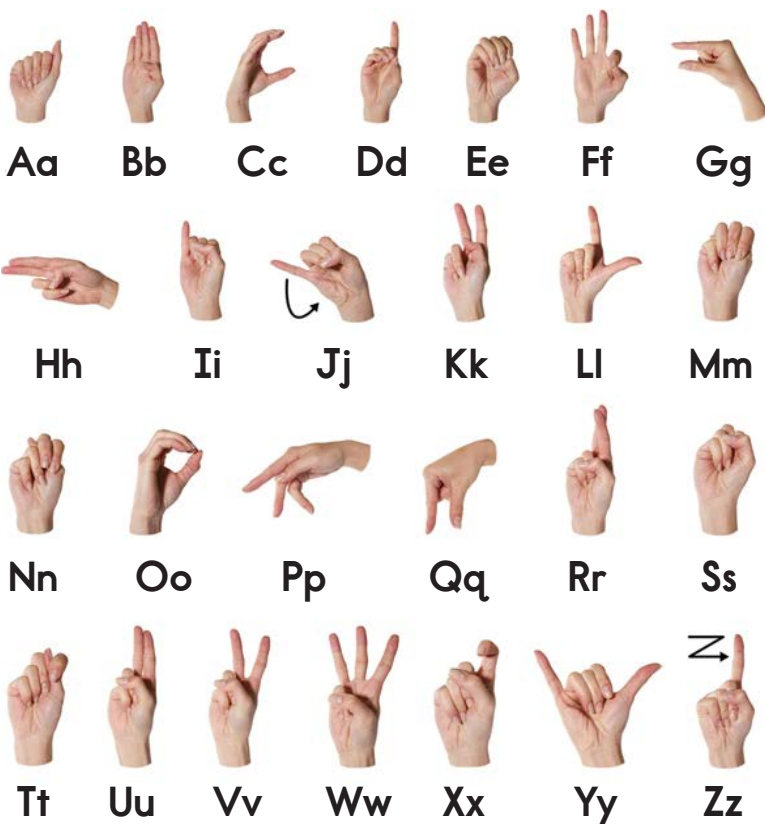
Sign Language and Hand Talk



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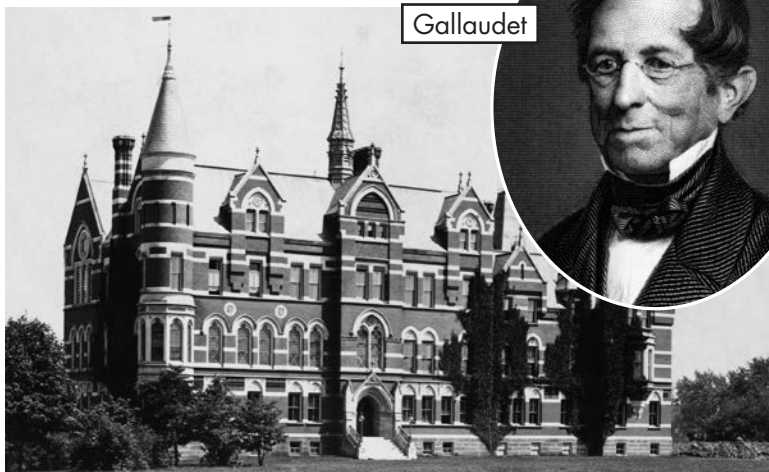


Introduction

People have always used their hands to **communicate**. Today, people still communicate with their hands. A police officer holds up a hand to stop a car. A dad waves his hand to say “hello” and “goodbye.” A mom uses her hand to “blow” her son a kiss.

People who are **deaf** or hard of hearing use their hands to make letters and words. This kind of communication is called **sign language**.

Sign language first started in the United States in 1815. An American named Thomas Gallaudet helped create an American Sign Language from French hand signs, Native American hand signs, and other hand signs.



Gallaudet College, 1897, a school for deaf students, was named for Thomas Gallaudet.



Learning Sign Language

Today, sign language is taught to deaf people from when they are very young. When a deaf child is playing with a ball, a parent uses two hands to make a sign for ball. Then, the parent points to the ball. The sign for ball is called a whole word sign. Deaf children also learn to use their fingers to make letters. They learn each letter of the alphabet. Making these different types of signs is called **signing**.

Deaf children make up ABC stories to practice signing letters. For example, the sign for the letter A looks like an apple. The letter B is flat like a table. The letter C is like an open mouth. This ABC story might be an apple sitting on a table waiting for a mouth to eat it. As each new letter of the alphabet is learned, a new part of the story is added.



Aa

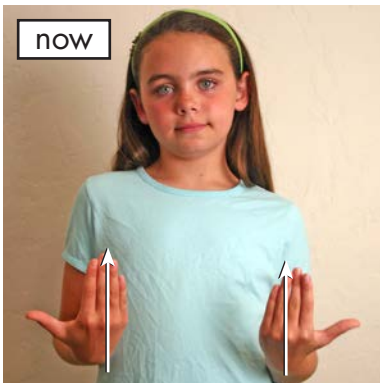
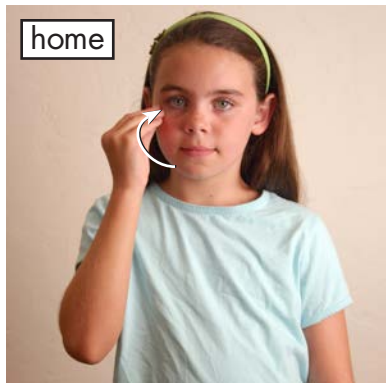


Bb



Cc

Whole word signs are used to make sentences. Whole word signs are made using hand movements. Body movements and changes in the face also are used. Signers watch people's hands, bodies, and faces. This helps them know what is being communicated.





Babies who are not deaf also can learn to use sign language. Babies can make signs before they can say words. Babies can learn to shape their hands like a cup and pretend to take a drink. This sign tells parents that the baby is thirsty. Babies also learn to make a fist when they want milk.





Teaching Signs to Animals

Some other animals can understand hand signs. For example, a dog owner can teach a dog to stay.

When the owner gives his dog the sign, the dog stays in one spot.

Signs also can be used to make a dog sit up, roll over, and lie down.

Koko is a famous gorilla that has been taught to use sign language. Koko learned to sign when she was a baby. She has learned more than 1,000 signs. Koko can tell her trainer when she is hungry, thirsty, happy, or sad.



Try This!

Learn the signs for some words. Practice by signing to a partner.

Try this sign to see if your partner can tell what you are trying to communicate.

Famous Sign Language Users

Helen Keller

Helen Keller could not see or hear. She used her **sense** of touch to communicate.

People could use their fingers to sign letters on the palm of Helen's hand.

Helen also would touch people's lips as they spoke.

She understood what they were saying by the changing shape of their lips. Helen became an **inspiration** to many people.





Heather Whitestone

In 1994, Heather Whitestone became Miss America. She was the first deaf person to win the contest. She danced to music she couldn't hear.

Since winning the crown, Heather has spoken and written books about living as a deaf person. She is an inspiration to many people, too.



William Ellsworth Hoy

William Ellsworth Hoy was the first deaf major league baseball player. In 1901, he hit the first grand slam home run in the American League. Hoy taught his team members sign language. He made up many of the signs that coaches, players, and umpires use today.

Conclusion

Everyone uses some kind of sign language or hand talk every day. Many deaf people communicate by signing. Babies, animals, and people who can hear also can learn to understand hand signs.



Glossary

communicate (<i>v.</i>)	to make thoughts or ideas known (p. 4)
deaf (<i>adj.</i>)	able to hear little or nothing at all (p. 5)
inspiration (<i>n.</i>)	a good influence (p. 12)
sense (<i>n.</i>)	a way of understanding the world through sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing (p. 12)
sign language (<i>n.</i>)	a system of hand, face, and body movements used to communicate (p. 5)
signing (<i>n.</i>)	using sign language (p. 6)

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