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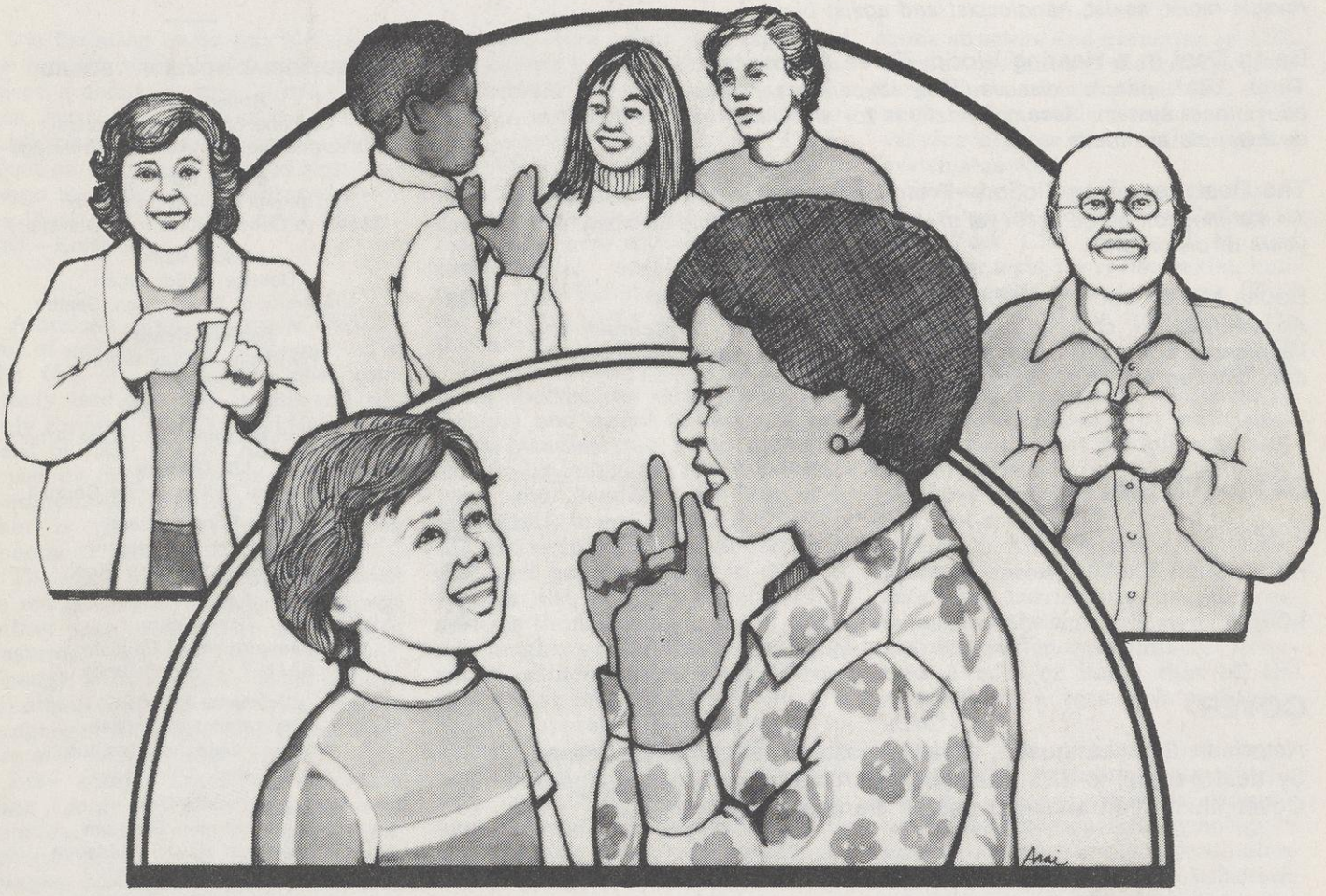

American Sign Language: An Analysis

A Review of Deafness in Children's Books

INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

BULLETIN

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ARTICLES

DEPARTMENTS

COVER

American Sign Language, a visual-gestural language developed by deaf people, is discussed in the article beginning on page 3. Cover illustration showing people signing by Tomie Arai.

Indexed in
Education Index
ERIC *IRCD*

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An analysis of American Sign Language—and the texts used to teach it—reveals racist, sexist, handicapist and ageist bias

Bias and Stereotypes in American Sign Language

By Janet Acevedo and Glenn Anderson

The following study was initiated at the request of the CIBC after we received a complaint from Judith Silverman, Assistant Director of the Baldwin Public Library in Nassau County (N.Y.), about an exceedingly biased sign language text that she had discovered in her library and hoped to have reevaluated.—Editors.

American Sign Language (ASL)—one of several signing systems used in the U.S.—is the fourth most commonly used language in this country; only English, Spanish and Italian are used by more people. ASL was developed by deaf people as a means of communicating through a language that is visual and not based on sounds as are spoken languages.

The study of sign languages has led to recognition of ASL as a language rather than as a system of "glorified gestures" as popularly perceived. Though a difference in mode of communication exists between spoken languages and sign languages, there are also many similarities.

Like other languages, American Sign Language has a structure and grammar of its own (see box on following page). And like other languages, ASL is culturally based and therefore different from the signing systems used by people in other countries.* Again like spoken languages, ASL changes; new signs are developed to meet current needs, signs are borrowed from other languages and new signs are created from within the language to reflect changes in the environment or society. To take but one example, the sign for TELEPHONE was formerly two hands in the shape of fists, one over the mouth and the other over the ear. The current sign—more representative of the contemporary telephone—uses one hand, with the thumb touching the ear and the pinky extended to touch the mouth.

Just as spoken languages are now being analyzed for racist, sexist, handicapist and ageist stereotypes, and consciousnesses are being raised by examining languages for bias, stereotypes and "loaded words," so it is appropriate to analyze ASL, since it is the native language of thousands of deaf and hearing people in the U.S. ASL is also one of several signing systems through which deaf children are taught, as well as a language which is increasingly being learned as a second language. Therefore, it is equally appropriate to analyze its lexicon for the messages it conveys about people of different races, people with disabilities, people of different ages, and men and women. Although other signing systems do not have the same structure and grammar as ASL, they do use much of the same vocabulary. The comments about ASL signs made in this article therefore apply in varying degrees to the other signing systems as well.

Students in sign language classes at LaGuardia Community College in New York City examined 14 sign language texts for racist, sexist, handicapist and ageist stereotypes. They looked at the signs themselves, the folk etymologies or "origins" often provided by the author to explain the signs, and the practice sentences intended to develop signing proficiency. The students used the following definitions, based on CIBC criteria and modified slightly to relate to the visual aspects of ASL:

Racism: An over-simplified visual-gestural representation of a particular race that carries negative implications. Does the sign, folk etymology or practice sentence negatively stereotype a race or imply that all the members of a race look or behave alike?

Sexism: An over-simplified visual-gestural representation of a particular sex that carries negative connotations. Does the sign, folk etymology or practice sentence imply subordination of one sex or that certain behaviors are relevant to one sex but not the other?

Ageism: An over-simplified visual-gestural representation of a particular group of people based on age that carries negative implications. Does the sign, folk etymology or practice sentence demean or ridicule people or categorize people's behavior based on age?

We would like to express our appreciation to Dr. Nancy Frishberg and Allyn Winslow for their assistance in the development of this article.—Janet Acevedo and Glenn Anderson

*Attempts have been made to develop a universal sign language—Gestuno—but like Esperanto, the "universal" spoken language, it is not widely used.

About ASL

American Sign Language (ASL or Ameslan) is a gestural language that relies on the eyes—rather than the ears—to *receive* information and on the hands, face, head, body, posture and utilization of space in front of the body to *convey* information. ASL is not limited to the use of the hands, as is commonly thought; the whole body communicates.

Although ASL has been in use for nearly 200 years—and is the language of choice of most deaf people—it is only recently that it has been recognized by linguists as a valid language. (This decision, as is true of matters related to other minorities, was made by the majority hearing culture.) ASL is a language with its own grammar and syntax; it is not English conveyed through gestures, although such systems exist.

The ways in which deaf people have been taught to communicate has to a large degree been determined by the hearing majority. There has even been considerable controversy about the "right" of deaf people to communicate in ASL. Some people (the majority of whom are hearing) advocate signed English; others (again, the majority of whom are hearing) stress the oral/aural method; *i.e.*, that deaf people learn to speak and lip-read. Again, it must be stressed that hearing people have long sought to decide what methods of communication are "best" for deaf people. These issues are addressed in the articles on pages 10-15.

The history of ASL is a long one. In 1816 Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet traveled to Europe to learn about methods for educating deaf people. He studied French Sign Language and how it was used to teach at the school for deaf people in Paris.

The earliest documentation of French Sign Language comes from the records of the Abbe de l'Epée, a teacher of deaf people whose career began in 1752. Epée discovered that although his students did not know French, they were communicating with each other through a naturally developed sign language. Epée's goal was to teach his students French, so he augmented the natural sign language, adding signs that corresponded to grammatical elements in French. This combination of natural sign language and signed French was what Gallaudet learned in Paris and brought back to the U.S.

When Gallaudet returned to America he came with one of his teachers—a French deaf man named Laurent Clerc. In 1817 Clerc and Gallaudet established the first American school for deaf people in Hartford, Conn. Clerc stayed there as an instructor for 40 years. (Reflecting the handicapist attitudes of that period, the school was called the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb. It is now called the American School for the Deaf.)

Until recently it was believed that deaf people in the U.S. suddenly started learning and using French Sign Language in 1817, and that they didn't have any language before that time. However, common sense tells us that as in France several different sign languages were probably used by the 2000 or so deaf people who were living in the U.S. in the early 1800's. We do know that deaf people in different areas of the U.S. probably had very little contact with each other since there were no public transportation services and no schools or organizations for deaf people to bring them together.

One very important consequence of the school in Hartford was that it brought large numbers of deaf people together for the first time, and thus fostered the development of a community of deaf people. American Sign Language evolved as this community combined some of the signs and structural characteristics of their own language(s) with French signs. It has been found that only approximately 60 per cent of the signs in ASL seem to have come from signs in French Sign Language; the remaining 40 per cent must have come from the signed language(s) used by American deaf people before Gallaudet and Clerc introduced French Sign Language.

In addition to deaf students, Clerc also trained hearing people who later became the directors for schools for deaf people in other areas. These people helped spread the use of ASL into other parts of North America.—From *ASL: A Look at Its History, Structure and Community* by C. Baker and C. Padden (T.J. Publishers) and *On the Other Hand: New Perspectives on A.S.L.* by L. Friedman (Academic Press).

Handicapism: An over-simplified visual-gestural representation of a particular group of people based on a disability that carries negative implications. Does the sign, folk etymology or practice sentence demean or ridicule persons with a particular disability or imply that certain behaviors are found among all the persons with a particular disability?

The 14 texts examined—listed at the end of this article—are those most frequently used in the U.S. to teach sign language. All texts did not include illustrations of the signs, folk etymologies and practice sentences. Five of the texts included all three elements. Three included only illustrations. Six of the texts included either illustrations with practice sentences or folk etymologies with practice sentences. Students were instructed to indicate whether the signs themselves were stereotypic and/or whether stereotypes were evident in the folk etymologies or practice sentences.

Texts Contain Stereotypic Signs

Almost all texts carried stereotypical signs for races, disabilities and gender- and age-related topics. Among the vocabulary items that were identified as illustrating racial stereotypes were the signs for ASIAN PEOPLE (index finger extended to pull at corner of one eye to indicate slanted eyes); AFRICA, AFRICANS and BLACK PEOPLE (all fingers of the hand extended except the middle finger, which pushes the tip of the nose inward to indicate flat noses); NATIVE AMERICANS (thumb and index finger touching, last three fingers extended; hand touches face at the corner of the nose and moves to the back of the cheek to indicate feathers or face paint).

Only one text—*Talk to the Deaf*—included the sign for Black people, and it was described under the word NEGRO. Most other texts were racist by omission—*i.e.*, they did not present any sign for Black people. Although many deaf people now use the sign for the color BLACK when referring to Black people, as is increasingly used by the Black community, this was not mentioned in any text.

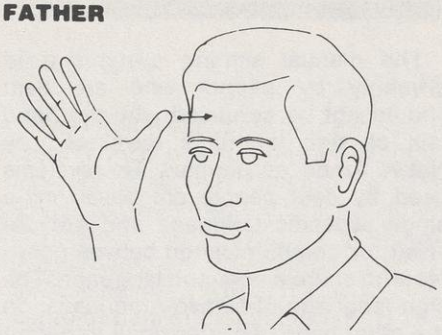
Although signs for Spain and Mexico were sometimes given, the signs for Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Latin and South American countries were never given. Some people who use ASL are attempting to adopt the signs for a particular country that are used

by deaf people *in that country*. For example, the sign used by deaf people in Japan for JAPAN, the sign used by deaf people in Africa for AFRICA and so on would become part of the ASL vocabulary. This attempt to make ASL less biased demonstrates concern about the stereotypes presently being conveyed through sign language vocabulary items, but such signs are not yet in common usage.

In terms of gender, the signs for MAN, WOMAN, MOTHER, FATHER and the like were considered sexist because of their location. The students noted that all the male signs are located around the forehead, all the female signs are located around the chin. To students this indicated visually that men are "above" women, or that men use their heads while women use their mouths, particularly since all the signs for rational processes (THINK, UNDERSTAND, KNOW, etc.) are made in the same areas as the masculine signs and all the signs related to speech are made in the same area as the female signs. (Some texts state that the sign for man comes from the tipping of a top hat and that the sign for woman comes from the old-fashioned bonnet string. This may or may not be the case since such "origins" are often invented to help students; in any event, in our society such signs reinforce sexist ideas that are prevalent in the dominant culture as well as within the deaf community.) Another sexist sign is that for VIRGIN (index and middle finger extended and separated—done in a circular motion around the side of the chin), which indicates that only females are virgins.

It is worth noting that none of the texts examined include much vocabulary having to do with sexuality, although these signs—some of them admittedly stereotypical—do exist. (Texts with a religious orientation are more likely to include such words as ADULTERY and VIRGIN.) To the extent that texts deal with signs relating to sexuality at all, they exhibit a heterosexist bias. It might be considered unrealistic to expect such vocabulary in sign language texts when it is not included in basic texts on other languages. On the other hand, there is much to be said for including the signs for a wide range of sexual behavior. First, it would serve as a recognition of the sexuality of *all* deaf people—both gay and non-gay—since one major stereotype about disabled people is that they are sexless. Such a vocabulary would fulfill many other purposes; for example, it would assist in teaching sex education to deaf children and be of great value to interpreters in a variety of settings including court rooms, social service agencies, etc. A specialized text—*Signs of Sexual Behavior* by James Woodward (T.J. Publishers, Silver Spring, Md.) has just been published; the book, which was not included in this study, has an excellent, non-biased introduction and covers sexual signs excluded from the standard texts.

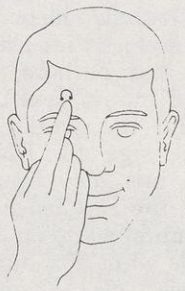
FATHER



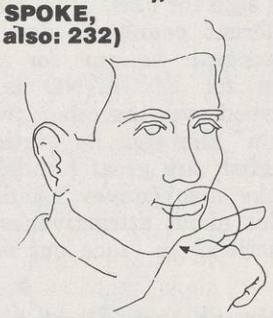
MOTHER

Signs related to gender are considered sexist because of their location—all male signs are made near the forehead in the same area as the signs for rational processes such as THINK; all female signs are made near the chin, in the same area as signs related to speech. This can be taken to indicate that men think while women talk—or that men are "above" women. Signs from A Basic Course in Manual Communication.

THINKING, WONDERING, (REASON)



SPEECH (See also: 200), SAY, SAID, SPOKE, TALK (See also: 232)



Occupational Signs Not Sexist

Although the locations for the male/female signs are considered sexist, it is generally true that ASL signs for various occupations are non-sexist. The signs for DOCTOR, NURSE, LAWYER, TEACHER, FLIGHT ATTENDANT, PRINTER, WAITER and other occupations relate to an activity involved in the occupation itself rather than to the sex of the worker. (The sign for NURSE, for instance, is formed by placing the index finger and middle fingers of one hand on the pulse of the other hand.) There is no distinction between actor and actress, waiter and waitress, and so forth, other than signing FEMALE or MALE *before* the occupation sign. Some of the texts, however, did not follow this rule. The sign for astronaut is given as ROCKET MAN and the sign for mail carrier is MAIL MAN in O'Rourke's 1978 text, and the sign for firefighter is illustrated as FIRE MAN in Watson's 1964 texts.

Examples of signs that were considered both racist and sexist include those for JEWISH PEOPLE (stroking the chin as if a beard were there), implying not only that all Jewish people are men, but also that they all have beards, and for people from INDIA (hand in a fist with the pinky extended—pinky touches center of forehead), indicating the red dot on the forehead worn by certain Indian women.

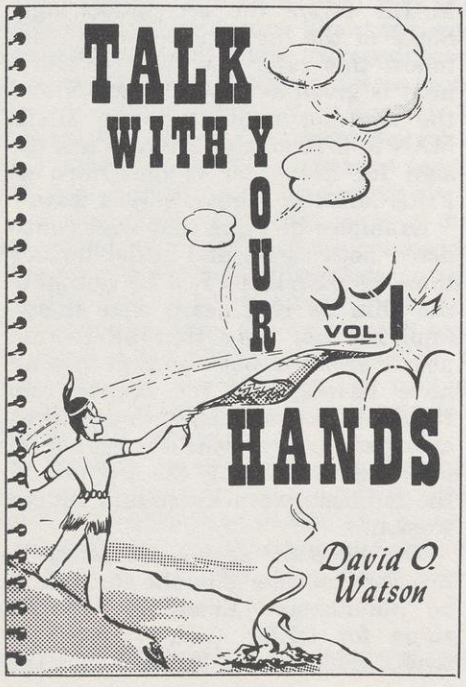
The signs for people with disabilities were considered by the students to be handicapist. Examples are the signs for DEAF (index finger extended, touches ear first and then the

mouth to indicate deaf people can neither hear nor speak) and for EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED PEOPLE (signed similarly to the gesture used by so many people in this country for "crazy," except the whole hand is used to indicate that the mind is all mixed up).

An example of an ageist sign that was also considered sexist is AGE, OLD (hand in fist starts at chin and moves downward), indicating a beard and also implying that only men grow old.

For some signs the configurations do not appear to be stereotypical in and of themselves but authors have added "instructions" or "folk etymologies" that evoke stereotypes. For instance, *Sign Language for Everyone* (Rice) states for STINGY, "Make the sign for Jew." The descriptions of different countries also draw upon stereotypic notions: for example, the sign for ENGLAND is one hand clasped over the other; two texts "explain" the sign by stating that the English are great handshakers. The books also convey handicapist attitudes about attractiveness: UGLY is described as "face out of shape" or "facial disfigurement," while BEAUTIFUL is "All of face neatly arranged." It should be noted that many of these etymologies are invented by teachers and authors to assist students and many have nothing at all to do with the actual origin of the sign. The sign for ENGLAND, for example, has also been said to be based on the English habit of carrying an umbrella and on the position of the hands while fox hunting (like all stereotypes, such comments draw upon an extremely limited view of a people). Students do not need folk etymologies in order to remember the signs, and such etymologies should not be encouraged. Students learning Spanish do not ask, nor are they told, why the word for "milk" is "leche" in Spanish. Even though the visual aspects of ASL may encourage such questions, sign language teachers and authors of sign language texts should not be expected to "explain" why signs are the way they are. This degrades the language.

Although there is no similarity between sign language and the hand talk of Native Americans (see box above), Talk With Your Hands *uses racist illustrations of Native Americans as a decorative element. The smoke signals on the cover are even less related to the topic at hand.*



The manual signing systems used primarily by people who are deaf should not be confused with the hand talk or sign language developed by Native American peoples. The systems used by deaf people are based on a single, specific language and are devised for communication between people who share a common language. The sign language of Native Americans, on the other hand, was designed to permit communication *across* language barriers; it was used for communication since more than 500 Native languages were spoken in North America alone.

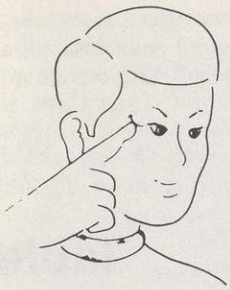
Many of the stereotypical signs mentioned above are accompanied by stereotypic descriptions; one finds: CHINA and JAPAN: "Slanted eyes of Orientals" (Rice, similarly Riekehof, 1978); INDIAN: "Painted streak up side of face" (Rice) and also "Ring in the nose and ear" (Riekehof, 1978); OLD: "Imitate old man stroking his whiskers with trembling hand" (Rice); BLIND: "Eyes pulled shut" (Riekehof, 1978); and CRIPPLED:* "Represents two legs hobbling along" (Riekehof, 1978). The sign for HEARING PERSON is explained as "hearing people can speak" (Riekehof, 1963 and 1978), as if no deaf person can.

Many of these books also have extended sections of religious vocabulary with a strong Christian—and more particularly evangelical—emphasis.* *Sign Language for Everyone* (Rice), for example, includes these practice sentences in the *first* lesson: "Boys and girls love Jesus," "Jesus likes men and women" and "Christ saves men, women, boys, and girls." *Talk with Your Hands* devotes a chapter to religion, concentrating on vocabulary from the Christian tradition and including the entire Lord's Prayer and several verses of "Jesus Loves Me." The book presents words related to Judaism in a biased (not to say ignorant) fashion. (In a mix-up of holiday and religion, the word "Passover" is included with a list of Christian denominations while other words associated with the Jewish faith are relegated to a separate page elsewhere in the section. Furthermore, to add insult to injury, the sign for "Jewish" or "Hebrew" is accompanied by the word "Yahweh" which is mistranslated as "Jewish holiday.") *Sign Language Made Simple*, published by the Gospel Publishing House, is also filled with countless religious statements—"We believe in the resurrection from death," "Jesus said we should deny ourselves," "Jesus Christ is the Word of Life," etc. etc. etc.—and the text of 66 hymns and numerous Christian scriptures to practice. The book also contains sentences that misrepresent Judaism or verge on anti-Semitism: "Jesus ministered in Judah (Jews), but was rejected," "The Priest in the Old Testament understood the Trinity" and "Did you know he is a Jew?" Although it also has a Christian orientation, *The Joy of Signing* is the only text that notes that BIBLE is signed as JESUS plus BOOK by Christians, but as "GOD'S BOOK" or "HOLY BOOK" by those of the Jewish faith (other texts give only the former sign). No text gives signs for religions not in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Students found a number of practice sentences that conveyed negative stereotypes about people. Some examples are: "The Indians live in New York and won't work" (Rice); "Most women are frightened of rats" (O'Rourke, 1973); "Deaf college students owe a

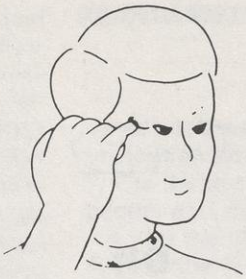
*The handicapist term "crippled" was used in this text.

*It should be noted that books published by religious publishing houses are in general use and, in fact, it was one such book—found in a public library—that sparked this article.



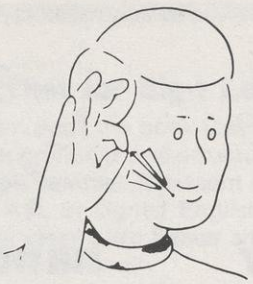
CHINA

With right index finger, push up corner of eye. *Slanted eyes of Orientals.*



JAPAN

With right "I" finger, push up corner of eye *Slanted eyes of Orientals.*



INDIANS

Draw tips of joined index finger and thumb of right hand up cheek from lips to ear. *Painted streak up side of face.*

OLD

Imitate an old man stroking his whiskers with a trembling hand.

Sign Language For Everyone *by Cathy Rice includes stereotypic signs and origins. (Origins are often invented by teachers and authors and they are therefore suspect.) In addition, the sign actually used for STINGY is not the same as the sign for JEW, so this text is unnecessarily biased.*

duty to deaf people," "A good husband plans ahead, A good wife makes her husband happy" (Fant, 1964); "You are just a young man," "You should be kind to old people" and "He who comes from Africa appreciates America" (Lawrence).

Practice sentences do more, however, than reflect the negative stereotypes and religious bias of the texts. They also convey a negative message about how students should communicate with deaf people. The sentences in sign language texts are almost always short and simple, implying this is the way one must talk with deaf people—using no compound or complex sentences. The sentences rarely, if ever, expose the student to the structure of an ASL sentence; they depend totally on English syntax. Students, therefore, get the impression that ASL is signed English except that it has its own "idioms." When these same students attempt to communicate with deaf people using their newly developed and very basic skills in signing, and the deaf people don't understand them, they blame the resulting miscommunication on deaf people's English skills rather than their own signing skills.

The illustrations in these texts also reveal bias. Most of the signs are demonstrated by white males—usually through drawings but occasionally in photos. Some books do include an occasional female figure, and one text (Huffman et al.) uses a female figure throughout. O'Rourke's first text uses male figures only, but his more recent work shows different male and female figures equally—and the drawings are of actual deaf people.

Although it is non-sexist in its use of illustrations, O'Rourke's new text is not non-racist—neither this text nor any other depicts Third World people signing. In spite of the racial diversity of the deaf community, there are no Black, Hispanic, Native American or Asian American signers in any book. (*Talk with Your Hands* has numerous racist pictures of Native Americans as a "decorative" element—including one "Indian" and a cowboy under the heading "kids' things.")

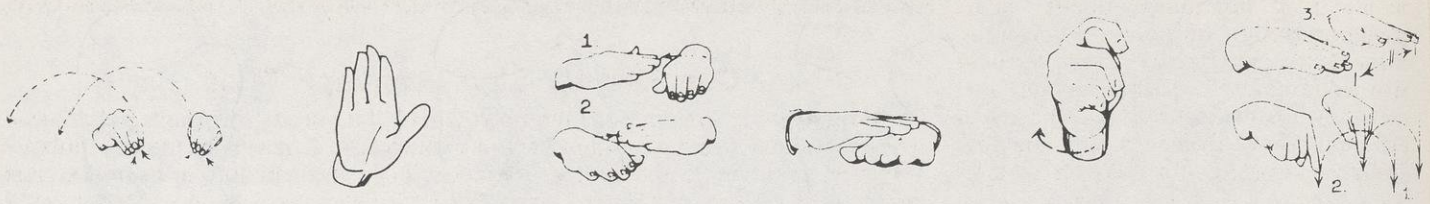
The illustrations in most texts present other difficulties because they show only what the hands do—and this does not accurately demonstrate ASL nor any other signing system such as signed English because of the necessity of using the face, eyes, body, head and space when communicating. (Some books don't even include illustrations!) *A Basic Vocabulary—American Sign Language for Parents and Children* is the only text that illustrates the entire body from the waist up and includes facial expressions, body posture, head tilt and use of space, all crucial elements in mak-

JEWS

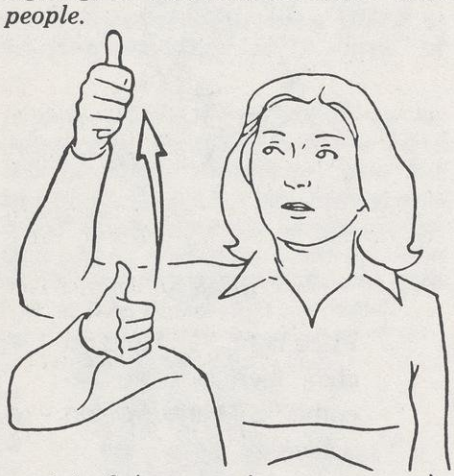
Place right "C" hand on chin; then close to become "S" hand. *Pull on goatee.*

STINGY

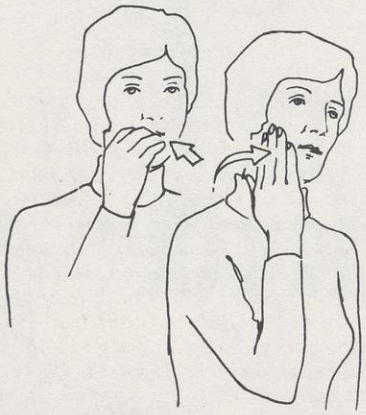
Make sign for "Jew."



Sign language texts that show hands in isolation do not accurately present signs; the example above is from Sign Language Made Simple. *Facial expressions and an indication of the use of space in front of the body should be included as they are in* A Basic Vocabulary—American Sign Language for Parents and Children *by T.J. O'Rourke (first illustration below).* Sign Language for Everyone *by J. Huffman et al. (second illustration below) also includes the body from the waist up, but not as consistently as the O'Rourke text. These two texts are among the few that depict women signing; no text includes Third World people.*



chief (most important)



placing a kiss on the cheek

kiss

ing accurate signs.

With the exception of O'Rourke's new text which presents an accurate description of ASL and a non-handicapist view of deaf people, the introductions in almost all the other texts—especially those authored by hearing people—convey handicapist views about deaf people and deafness.

The most offensive text is *Sign Language for Everyone* by Cathy Rice. Her focus is on deafness as related to "hearingness," rather than on deafness as related to deaf people. Deaf people are portrayed very negatively—as living in a world of "complete silence," as having no language, as being unable to speak, as taking things literally, and so forth. In reality, deaf people do have a highly articulate language (ASL), do have residual hearing (meaning most deaf people do hear sounds), and can use their voices (it's hearing people who give them odd looks who often discourage them from using their voices). Deafness is a disability, but this society often *makes* hearing impairment a handicapping condition.

Rice also includes inaccurate information about the origins of ASL as well as patronizing sexist, handicapist and ageist statements such as, "one lovely little deaf woman," "This little woman" and "It was surprising that a woman her age didn't know voices are different." Rice constantly uses the phrase "the deaf" and sometimes doesn't even use the article; "Deaf were in the services nightly" is but one example. Rice can hear. In fact, all but two of the authors of the sign language texts under review hear. (But it should be noted that even the authors who are deaf occasionally made reference to deaf people as "the deaf," a reference that limits identity to the fact of deafness and, in addition, has a strongly pejorative connotation.)

Sign language texts are among the few sources of published materials available to the general public about deaf people. It is thus imperative to provide accurate portrayals of the community of people who use ASL, particularly since many students learn a language in order to acquire an understanding of the culture in which the language is used. However, since many of these texts present handicapist misconceptions about deafness and deaf people, they cannot assist students in that goal. The books may, in fact, prevent members of the dominant (hearing) culture from learning about ASL and deaf people. Robin Battison and Cathy Cogan discuss this in "The Implications of Teaching ASL as a Second Language":*

> Generally we learn a foreign language in order to find out more about the people who use it, and to interact more easily in their society. But systematic instruction about deaf culture and history, and how it relates to language use, is seldom offered. *Contrary to the instructional situation with spoken languages, the emphasis has never been on integrating the Sign Language learner (hearing) into the deaf world, but rather the eventual integration of deaf people into the world of the hearing majority.* For this reason, many "ASL" classes turn into Sign English classes, despite the best efforts of skilled teachers.

This study has revealed that signs convey a variety of stereotypes that convey bias to all users—deaf or hearing. It has also revealed that sign language texts, especially those written by hearing authors, convey and reinforce inaccurate information and

*Paper presented at the Second Annual National Symposium on Sign Language Research and Training, Oct., 1978.

A special double issue of the BULLETIN on handicapism—discrimination based on disability—is available from the Council for $3. The issue, which includes lesson plans on countering handicapism, details common stereotypes about disabled people and analyzes the depiction of disabled people in children's books.

handicapist attitudes about deaf people and sign language. Therefore, these texts can hardly foster a positive self-image for deaf people, nor can they foster accurate and positive attitudes about deafness, deaf people and sign language for hearing people.

It should be noted here that while conducting this analysis, the authors encountered some resistance from both hearing and deaf people. "It's our language; why don't you leave it alone" and "It would be impossible to change ASL" were typical of the comments made by deaf people. Hearing people, on the other hand, stressed that "deaf people have enough problems" and that ASL should be left alone. Deaf people's responses have a lot to do with the long struggle to gain acceptance for ASL as a legitimate language; a certain amount of defensiveness is understandable. The comments of hearing people, on the other hand, are patronizing and imply that deaf people are too fragile to deal with any criticism of their language. None of this criticism, however, should discourage users of ASL who want to find positive alternatives for all signs that reinforce negative stereotypes.

And because ASL is like any other language and communicates and reinforces a culture's values and attitudes, it should be examined for the messages it conveys to all its users—both deaf and hearing. This includes the values and attitudes within the deaf community and those of the dominant culture, since deaf people interact both with other people who are deaf and with the dominant hearing community. It is equally valid to analyze—and criticize where appropriate—the texts that are used to teach the language.

The authors also want to stress that it would be inappropriate for readers to invent new signs for all stereotypical items. Changes can and will occur when people using and developing the language recognize, through consciousness raising, that fostering positive change within the lexicon will have a beneficial impact on all users of ASL. By focusing attention on societal bias in sign language and sign language texts, the authors hope that both teachers and users of sign languages will be encouraged to convey more accurate information not only about people of different racial groups, sexes, disabilities and ages, but also about deaf people and *their* language, ASL. □

Checklist for Sign Language Texts

- What signing system does the book teach? If it purports to teach ASL, does it present and discuss the grammar and structure of ASL as well as the vocabulary?
- Is the text handicapist or does it present an accurate picture of deafness, deaf people and the use of ASL or signed English (note especially the introduction)?
- Are the illustrations clear? Are hands shown in isolation or is their relationship to the face and body shown?
- Do the books reflect the racial diversity of the deaf community or do they show only white people or depict people of color in a stereotypic or offensive fashion?
- Are the illustrations sexist? Do they show only males? Are women shown only for words traditionally associated with women (like perfume)?
- Are stereotypic signs (like putting on warpaint for INDIAN) included without comment? Does the book give the current sign for Black person (the same as the color black) or does it give the old sign (flatten nose)?
- Are stereotypic/racist explanations or etymologies included?
- Are signs ageist? Handicapist? Otherwise discriminatory?
- Are practice sentences racist, sexist, handicapist or otherwise discriminatory?

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About the Authors

JANET ACEVEDO is Coordinator of Sign Language and Interpreter Training Programs and GLENN ANDERSON is Coordinator of Programs for Deaf Adults in the Division of Continuing Education at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, Long Island City, N.Y. Ms. Acevedo holds a Master's Degree in Deafness Rehabilitation from New York University and is a certified interpreter and certified sign language instructor. Mr. Anderson holds a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Arizona and is currently working on his doctoral dissertation at New York University.

Three deaf people discuss their experiences, focussing on the educational system. Recommendations for more equitable treatment of deaf people are made

Being Deaf in a Hearing World: Three Accounts

"It's Hearing People Who Make Problems for Deaf People"

By Pedro Acevedo

I was born in Cuba. My deafness didn't matter there; my neighbors knew how to work with me, how to teach me, they were available whenever I needed them. I came to the U.S. when I was nine years old and entered a school where the oral method was taught. I remember one girl whose parents were deaf and taught her how to sign; she used her hands when she talked. The teachers tied her hands and put tape over her mouth as a punishment.

No one understood me because I didn't know English. I wanted to use Spanish—I knew Spanish—but teachers kept telling me that I didn't know what I was talking about because I didn't know the English words. A cousin used to help me after school; he would explain things to me in Spanish so that I could learn English. It was due to him—and one teacher who took the time to give me extra help—that I finally managed to begin to learn English.

* * *

My mother went to talk to the principal on my first day in school in the U.S. The principal told her that she should not use Spanish at all with me, that he couldn't allow my mother to use Spanish with me. My mother said what are you talking about? I don't know English, I only speak Spanish. The principal still said "No, no, don't use Spanish. You must use English." Even though I continued to use Spanish at home I proved I could still learn English, I could still succeed and pass the courses.

* * *

Every morning I would talk to my mother in Spanish. On the way to school I would talk to the children in ASL. Then at school I had to be oral and use English. Every day I used three languages. I liked all three languages, but it was difficult in school; when teachers turned to write on the board or when they talked fast or would talk to each other I couldn't understand what they were saying.

I started going to a hearing high school but wasn't learning anything. Most teachers couldn't make the material clear. I transferred to a residential school for deaf students. I saw the kids signing to each other and I saw the teachers signing. I couldn't believe it; it was really fascinating. Then I saw a deaf teacher. I was so confused. I had never seen a deaf teacher—I thought that only hearing teachers taught deaf children. I learned so much from those teachers because I felt very comfortable.

* * *

It was very natural for me to use my hands when I spoke. In my culture people use their hands and have a very expressive body language. Here I wasn't allowed to use my hands at all; teachers would punish me if I moved my hands. They would say "stop using that sign language; use your voice." I tried to explain that I wasn't signing, I was just moving my hands. But they didn't accept this so I finally stopped using my hands when I was in school.

* * *

Years later the oral school I first went to asked me to tell the students about my job. But the principal said, when you talk you cannot use signs, you have to do it orally. I asked how the students at the back of the auditorium were going to understand me. How was I going to explain my job using the oral method? They would not know what I was talking about. She said "No, use just your voice." When I got up on the stage I started using signs but they told me to stop signing. I said you can hear, you can hear what I'm saying and you can understand me, but what about the deaf kids? They can't hear me, they can't see my lips because they're too far away. I said forget it, and I walked off the stage. The principal was shocked. They wanted to put me on video tape and let the kids see me in small groups at some other time. I said no, not without sign language, so finally they let me make the tape and sign.

Pedro Acevedo with his daughter Tarah and Danielle Adeeb, Glenn Anderson's daughter.

I went back to the school again when I was working at NYU to tell the children about the NYU counseling program for deaf people. I met one boy and the teacher told me that the boy was Spanish and retarded too. Why are you calling him retarded? I asked. Well, he can't communicate, the teacher answered (a section of the school was using signed English by that time). So I said use Spanish signs and he will be able to understand you. I went over to the child and I talked to him in Spanish sign language. He understood me. The teacher was shocked; he couldn't believe it.

* * *

Hearing teachers try to make deaf children into hearing people. They don't teach them enough—they give them baby words instead of the information they need. Teachers only care about controlling and disciplining the children. Often the children are from different cultures and the teachers have a hard time dealing with that. White teachers often don't understand the Spanish culture or the Black culture or Asian cultures.

So many hearing professionals—teachers, social workers, counselors—don't know anything about deafness, they don't know how to communicate with deaf people. Deaf people will be explaining their problems and the professionals will be criticizing them and telling them no, that's wrong, don't do that. The professionals misunderstand, they don't get the meaning of what the deaf persons are saying. These hearing people say that deaf people have a low level of language, but it isn't true. Deaf people have their own language—and there are variations in people's ability to use it. Some are fluent in ASL, some aren't.

I read about an athlete who couldn't read and couldn't write—this basketball player's language was very basic, but he makes a million dollars—and hearing people will accept that, but they won't accept deaf people who aren't fluent in spoken English.

* * *

Hearing people say that deaf people have so many problems. It's really not deaf people's problems—it's hearing people that make problems for deaf people. Our biggest problem isn't that we can't hear; it's that hearing people assume that they understand what we need without asking us. But even when they ask, they don't take the time to really communicate with us so they get a true understanding of what we've said.

* * *

Hearing children can learn from a variety of sources that deaf children aren't exposed to. In a library, hearing people can ask for information, but deaf people can't get served in a public library; nobody knows how to sign. Professionals in all kinds of service areas should know sign language. □

About the Author

PEDRO ACEVEDO is a paraprofessional at Passaic County (N.J.) Vocational Technical High School. He also teaches ASL in several colleges and social service agencies.

"We Seem to Have A Monocultural Approach to Deafness"

By Glenn Anderson

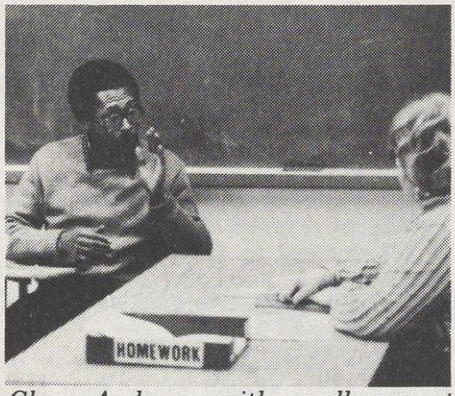
The first portion of Mr. Anderson's comments were made at a parent workshop sponsored by Junior High School 47, School for the Deaf, New York City. The balance were made during an interview with CIBC staff.

At the present time, both in the U.S. and in many other parts of the world, there is serious disagreement among educators and parents as to how deaf children should be instructed in school. The focus of the argument, which has continued for over 100 years since the first school for deaf children was established in this country, has been the type of communication skills the teacher and parents should use and which communication skills the deaf child should ultimately acquire. The disagreements deal more with acquiring oral/aural skills to compete in a society where the majority hear and talk, and less with intellectual and experiential skills important to educational and social development.

. . . A positive self-identity along with self-respect and self-confidence will not develop effectively if the deaf child is not fully accepted as a deaf individual who has a culture, history and community of other deaf individuals in whatever city of the United States s/he lives in.

We can not assume that all deaf children will learn to speak English fluently, will learn to lip read English fully, and will acquire the ability to read and write effectively. . . . By emphasizing the acquisition of English through lip reading, supplemented by amplification, along with intensive practice in speech production, while excluding or minimizing the visual aspects of communication, we are focusing more on children's deficiencies and less on their strengths.

. . . My concern is with how to best facilitate the acquisition of the speech and language skills which directly influence the development of a positive self-identity, self-respect and self-confidence. . . . In other words, deaf people depend on a multi-faceted ap-



Glenn Anderson with a colleague at LaGuardia Community College.

proach to communication that is primarily visual with oral/aural skills being only secondary.

This emphasis on visual reception of information is important because it has been well documented that even the best lip reader can rarely receive more than 30 per cent of normal conversational speech.

. . . Not to open all the appropriate communications channels, focusing on strengths in the visual area first and on the deficient aural area second, is to advocate an inefficient approach to communication with deaf children and adults.

* * *

Before I entered Gallaudet College I had never seen a deaf person in a professional position and I wasn't aware that deaf people could earn master's degrees or Ph.D.'s or teach at a college level. I was nineteen years old when I first realized this, and I think that was very unfortunate because we have to think about career objectives when we are younger than nineteen. Most of the people who teach deaf children are not themselves deaf and this is not always helpful in fostering positive self-concepts in deaf children. It also prevents deaf children from learning first hand from other deaf people about some of the options open to them.

* * *

Educators insist that deaf children acquire spoken English skills so they can be accepted into a hearing world. My mother and father were told this; they were told that this is a hearing world, not a world for deaf people, and that deaf people have to fit in. What happens is that the cultural value of sign language, deaf people's relationships to their community, and deaf people's relationship to all of their own organizations that advocate on their behalf are minimized in comparison to the values of the dominant (hearing) culture.

We now have information from several research studies indicating that deaf children who learned ASL as their native language (usually from deaf parents) performed better academically than children who did not learn sign language in the home at an early age. The research has also indicated that ASL can assist in the development of English language skills and that it is not detrimental to the development of speech and lip-reading skills. The important issue here is that deaf children of deaf parents are more likely to experience natural and spontaneous communication with their parents than deaf children of hearing parents who did not know sign language. Establishing a foundation for communication at an early age is crucial to educational development.

* * *

Deaf children need to read more materials produced by deaf authors as well as those produced by hearing authors. This is as true for deaf people as it is for other minority groups. We rarely read much about the history and culture of deaf people, although there is much that could be said about them. For instance, we hear a lot about the special Olympics for the Handicapped, which is not run by disabled people, but the public doesn't hear or read much about the American Athletic Association of the Deaf (AAAD) basketball, volleyball, and softball tournaments, which are run entirely by deaf people—and the AAAD has been in operation for 35 years. Events run by hearing people are publicized much more than those run by deaf people themselves. Most of the publicity about events sponsored by the AAAD appears in publications for deaf people. They have tried to obtain publicity through the newspaper and television but have not usually been successful. A similar thing happens about other organizations that are *for*—but not *of*—deaf people.

There does seem to be momentum generating among deaf people to demand that more deaf people be hired in positions of leadership within programs and agencies serving deaf people; this momentum may be a spin-off from general activism occurring among disabled people. As an example, the Bay Area in California has witnessed the establishment of a job placement agency called Deaf Self-Help, Inc. This is a beautiful concept—deaf people establishing programs to help themselves. The program has proven so successful that four branch offices have been set up in other parts of Northern California.

* * *

In addition to having children's books written by deaf people, I would like to see children's books about ordinary deaf people—people who have to deal with the everyday problems of life. Too often the super heroes like Helen Keller are emphasized. We need literature about a variety of people; not every child is going to go to college and not every child will get a Ph.D. In addition, many of these super heroes have had advantages that most children don't have. Helen Keller, for instance, had a tutor working with her all day, every day. She was also an extraordinary person. Many deaf children will read about her and say, I will never be able to do that. Why should I go on?

* * *

We seem to have a monocultural approach to deafness. We need a multicultural approach to help deaf children become aware of the cultural diversity that exists within the deaf


Dorothy Pakula, coordinator of tutorial services, Guided Independent Study Program for Deaf Adults, LaGuardia Community College.

community. Minority deaf children are part of more than one culture.

* * *

Racial issues are not extensively discussed in professional literature in the area of deafness. There have been a few articles that have attempted to deal with such issues, but they have not made much impact in the field. In part this can be attributed to the fact that only a handful of Black and other Third World professionals work in the area of deafness, and even fewer are in any positions of leadership.

Several years ago, I submitted for publication in a professional journal an article that dealt with racial issues within the deaf community. Before the article was accepted for publication, it was watered down by a "co-author" that the editor gave my article to. I was not pleased with the watered-down version because it avoided the real issues that I had intended to address. The issues are still not being addressed.

* * *

In almost any city in the U.S., a deaf person can find a deaf organization, a group of deaf people, so that a newcomer need not/will not feel isolated. So many people say that deafness is a silent world. This is absurd. I will be welcomed in any city. Deaf people will show me around and tell me what is good about the city, what is available for deaf people. I will have the opportunities to play basketball or softball or join a bowling team. There might be a newspaper of some kind. And I'll be able to learn about what deaf people have accomplished in that area. When you talk about deaf culture, you are also talking about how deaf people themselves have made it possible for other deaf people to accomplish something. This is getting away from the whole idea that deaf people cannot help themselves.

About the Author

GLENN ANDERSON, co-author of the preceding article, is Coordinator of Programs for Deaf Adults in the Division of Continuing Education at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, Long Island City, N.Y. He holds a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Arizona and is currently working on his doctoral dissertation at New York University.

"Involve the Deaf Community in the Learning Process"

By Mary Beth Miller

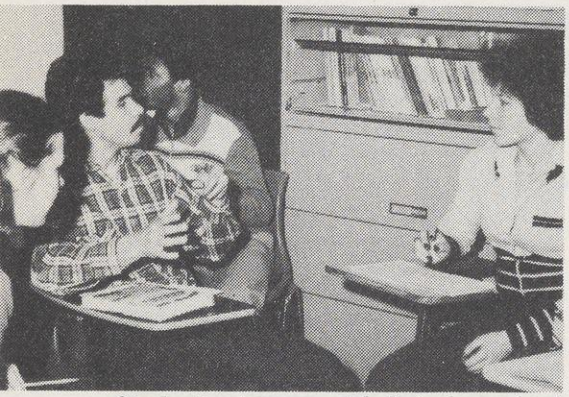
Try to picture a deaf child who has no language skills spending his or her first year in school trying to learn how to speak, trying to learn signed English and trying to learn to write English in addition to other subjects. These children are under tremendous pressure. Not knowing English or signed English makes the child develop low self-esteem; they usually feel very inferior about their use of English when they become adults. Some children look down on those who use ASL without realizing that ASL is their own language too. They develop that attitude from their teachers who look down on ASL and call it broken English. Some deaf children look down on sign language in general; they do not want to sign in public because people will see that they are "deaf and dumb." They get that attitude from their teachers or parents. Such hearing people encourage prejudices among deaf people.

* * *

It is difficult for deaf people to come together to write letters to their congressional representatives, to managers of television stations that decide to eliminate captioned news or to TV or film producers that use hearing actors to portray deaf characters; it is difficult to come together to lobby in the state capitols. The low self-esteem of childhood is translated into passivity in adulthood. Activism is left to the few deaf people who do the leg work. We are not angry about it; we understand it is because of the educational system.

Deaf people are beginning to protest about the treatment they receive from the hearing world. There have been numerous protests in the last few years. For instance, in 1978 there were protests against the ABC after-school program "Mom and Dad Can't Hear Me" because hearing actors were chosen to portray deaf parents and portrayed them in a demeaning manner. There was also a boycott against the movie *Voices* because the principal character who was supposed to be deaf was played by a hearing actress. The film was withdrawn in

Mary Beth Miller signing "rainbow" in Handtalk: An ABC of Finger Spelling & Sign Language.



Students in a guided independent study class for deaf students at LaGuardia Community College, in which sign language is used as the mode of communication.

response to the protests. Qualified deaf actors could have appeared in either the movie or TV program—why weren't they hired? Deaf people are currently trying to get telephone companies to reduce rates for deaf consumers who have a telecommunications (TTY) machine. (The TTY—which is something like a combination of a telephone and a telex or typewriter—transmits messages in print.) The TTY is a slow process for communicating and deaf users feel that it is unfair to pay the same rates that hearing people do, but so far their protests have not been uniformly successful in all states. There will be many more protests in the future because we are more aware of our rights and of the legal protection offered by Section 504, the civil rights portion of the Federal Rehabilitation Act.

* * *

The educational system needs feedback and input from deaf people. We are in the community, we are working, and we could be excellent role models for deaf children. Hearing teachers can not become role models because they are not deaf, but deaf children will always be deaf, they will never be hearing people. There are very few hearing teachers who are willing to meet with deaf adults in the community. Most of them teach from 8-2:30 and then zoom home. They do not take the extra time to learn how to communicate with deaf parents. How can they know where deaf children will go when they finish school? These children will be dumped into the community and we have to undo what the school did to them. We communicate with them, give them advice, and set up sign language classes for them.

* * *

There are people who study sign language for ten weeks or a year or two, and then start their own sign language classes. Hearing consumers enroll in their class and only later find out that the instructor is not qualified to teach sign language. Some hearing people should not teach sign language at all because they do not live in our community; they are people who never met deaf adults, people who feel comfortable only with deaf children—deaf children who are defenseless and cannot fight back.

Instructors often take what they have learned, tamper with it and change it to suit the needs of parents who are willing to learn the language to communicate with their children. What they learn is language made easier for them, it is not the language that the children or deaf adults in the community use.

* * *

Many hearing parents do not make enough effort to introduce their children to the deaf community. They have been advised against it because deaf people are "wild." Sign language is a gestural visual language that requires the use of facial expression and body movement to communicate; people misunderstand and think that signers are wild when they're merely communicating in their own language.

I remember one teacher who tried to prevent me from signing to other deaf children in my class. She tied my hands together because I was "a bad influence." I felt like a criminal. I told my parents about it and they wrote a note to the teacher. So she changed; she put me in the corner. I used to have to sit in the corner for hours. I didn't sit there doing nothing. I thought and thought about my rights to communicate in any way I want. I became much stronger and a believer in my own rights to communicate with my deaf peers in whatever way I want.

* * *

I was a star pupil. At the beginning it was fun because I got all the attention. Ultimately, however, being the star pupil was a bad experience. I discussed this with a hearing friend who was once a poster child. She said that people grabbed her to pose for pictures. Many people patted her on the head; some were gentle and some were not. She was dragged to many places. She became terrified. The attention I got was different but I understood how she felt. Later, I felt that what had happened was unfair. I was a stereotype of an ideal student. I did not represent all deaf children. I only represented myself—a good, bright student who had good speech.

Visitors often came to my classrooms—visitors who served on the Board of Directors at my school, visitors from state agencies, visitors with deaf children, visitors who were interested in finding methods to teach deaf children. I was often chosen to "perform" because I could lip-read very well and because I had what the teacher called almost "normal" voice. I could lip-read and perform such tasks as: "open the door," "close the window," "hop" and so forth.

I was also asked to recite orally a simplified version of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag (the teacher thought the original was too difficult for us to pronounce). The words were something like this: "This is my flag/ Red, White, Blue/ I love my flag." Visitors usually cried. They would hug me and give me sorrowful looks.

Other members of my class were not as fortunate as I was and they were left out. They felt jealous, they felt stupid and they felt inferior about their language skills. I didn't realize this until I was much older. My classmates teased me about being the star pupil and their teasing was at times very cruel. I was too young to say to my teachers no, I don't want to.

When I became a freshman in high school teachers began to use ASL in the classroom. My achievement test score showed a 22 point increase over the 8th grade. With ASL I learned very, very rapidly. I became hungry and demanded more from my teachers because I knew that I had a right to learn.

* * *

It's much easier to criticize than it is to really understand the problems. It's much easier to say "I don't care" because if you care, there's a lot to be done. But deaf children have been experimented with for too long; it is

time that they were given a decent education.

Some suggestions for improving the education of deaf children follow. They are based on my personal experiences, on my discussions with other teachers working with deaf children and on discussions I have had with deaf children.

- The teaching of sign language should be standardized. There are many different schools for the deaf and each uses its own variations of a signing system, so there is a lot of confusion. Sign language systems should be consistent. More schools should teach ASL, the language that belongs to deaf people and that was created by deaf people themselves. Schools should admit that signed English is not the best and only method.
- Schools should also hire more deaf teachers and involve the deaf community in the learning process so that children will be exposed to deaf people as role models and to ASL. What about alumni of the school?
- Deaf children should learn ASL first. When they have developed language skills, they will be in a better position to learn to lip-read and to speak English. Only 5 per cent of deaf children succeed in the oral method; what happens to the other 95 per cent? Maybe I should say it another way: begin to teach sign language to deaf children when they are as young as a year old. *Then* teach speech along with sign language. Once children have a visual concept of their language, they can learn how to speak and lip-read English. My parents are deaf and I began to learn ASL when I was nine or ten months old. I learned speech later, beginning when I was two or three years old. I believe this is the best method and research supports my feelings.
- People working with deaf children should explore different ways to work with them; they should have positive attitudes towards the children, their deafness and their language—ASL.
- People working with deaf children should bear in mind that deaf children will learn sign language one way or another out of a necessity to communicate.
- Most of all, parents should be told the truth. Some parents are told that if their children learn sign language, they won't be able to talk. Parents should be told about different methods of communication—not just the oral method, not just signed English, not just ASL. Many parents find out much later and much too late that many methods exist. Their resentment can be felt.
- Hearing parents of deaf children should meet deaf adults. Deaf adults are not usually involved in parent counseling situations, but they can best show parents the options for their children when they finish school—college, the job world, marriage and many other things. Parents should have the opportunity to be taken into the deaf community. Parents should be able to see a TTY and captioned films. They should join deaf clubs; the Junior National Association of the Deaf and other wonderful organizations exist in most cities. Parents should share two cultures with their children.
- Many deaf people are not anti-hearing but they are afraid of being hurt, afraid of being taken advantage of. They are skeptical of hearing people and of their motives.
- Lastly, individuals working with deaf children and adults need to ask themselves: do you enjoy what you're doing, are you qualified to do what you're doing, are you willing to spend your working lives working with deaf children and adults? Most of all, do you *show* kindness, caring and understanding? These feelings—which have nothing to do with patronizing, condescending feelings of pity—must be demonstrated, not just talked about. □

About the Author

MARY BETH MILLER, co-author of Handtalk: An ABC of Finger Spelling and Sign Language *(Parents' Magazine Press), teaches ASL at New York University and is Assistant Research Scientist at NYU's Deafness Research and Training Center. A former member of the National Theatre of the Deaf and Little Theater of the Deaf, she has an M.A. in Educational Theater from Connecticut College and an M.A. in Deaf Education from NYU.*

For the last century—a period that progressive deaf people refer to as The Hundred Years War—the deaf have been deprived of their native language by a hearing society that insists they be "normal"—that is, like hearing people. The choice presented to parents of deaf children was a simple one: either they used sign, in which case their child would never learn to talk and would sink into a dreaded underworld of silence; or they took what is known as the "oral" approach—intensive training in speech and lip reading—in which case everything would be fine.

Oralism became an article of faith and was preached with an evangelical fervor that tolerated no exceptions. When children at oral schools (an invention of hearing professionals) resorted to informal signing among themselves, they had their hands slapped. Parents, frustrated by their children's slow progress in communication skills and emotionally distraught over the fact that they never knew how their children felt, could never convey as simple and important a phrase as "I love you" in sign. Gesture was fine if you were a third-base coach or Leonard Bernstein or a working-class Italian, so the oralist argued. Signing came to be regarded as shameful, dirty, almost profane. . . .

The replication of speech, as effortless as it may have seemed to those of us born into the world with all of our senses, is a remarkable feat of learning. As a muscular skill alone it is a subtle coordination of teeth, tongue, palate, jaws, cheeks and lungs, by far the most difficult task any of us have to master. It is now thought that as many as 90 percent of the deaf fail at the task. . . .

Thanks to the efforts of the deaf themselves, those who work with the deaf have begun to look beyond the lips and vocal chords. Sign language, once regarded as a kind of pidgin approximation of English, is now widely recognized as a separate language, one which for the deaf is infinitely more flexible and reliable than English. The primacy of the pure "oral" approach is slowly crumbling under the weight of new research that shows that the acquisition of speech for the deaf child is not retarded by early use of sign. More and more people are coming to accept the view that though the oralist may grow up knowing how to say things, those who have been permitted access to every means of communication grow up having something to say.—From "The Silent Party: Entering A Deaf World" by Deborah Larned Romano, *Mother Jones*, January, 1980.

The Deaf Person in Fiction— From Sainthood to Rorschach Blot

By Trenton Batson

During the 1960's and '70's, an unprecedented number of publishing houses brought out books of fiction with deaf characters. There was more serious fictional treatment of the subject during that period than in all the previous centuries.

One would like to feel encouraged by such interest, for it makes us hopeful that deaf people may now be sharing in the greater acceptance of human differences that seem to have developed in the last few years. And there is ample reason to wish that the experience of deafness be portrayed more realistically, for if one reads through the literature of deafness one finds mostly distortion and misrepresentation. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, deaf characters were either curiosities or saints. In the twentieth century, until the recent interest in the fictional use of deaf characters, deafness had most popularly been used to evoke a sense of loneliness and isolation.* But, even with the wider interest in deaf characters in fiction today, the experience of being deaf is still not written about with real understanding.

What we find in this recent group of books with deaf characters is not so much a new literary interest in the experience of being deaf as a discovery that using deaf characters is a convenient literary device. As Dr. McCay Vernon, head of the Department of Psychology at Western Maryland College (where he teaches deaf students), puts it, deaf characters in fiction are like Rorschach blots: neutral stimuli onto which the author, the reader or other characters in the stories can project their own fantasies about life.

Deaf characters are useful, in other words, not so much for their deafness as for their silence. Forget that deaf people living in the U.S. are generally gregarious, because the life patterns of deaf people do not generally suit the artistic purposes of writers. Most writers portray deaf characters as the popular mind conceives them: isolated, helpless, victimized. It is this pathetic isolation the writer wants to evoke; if we manage to change this popular view of deaf people, writers will simply look elsewhere for their model of isolation.

John Singer, the deaf hero of the immensely popular 1940 novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers (Alan Arkin played Singer in the movie version), is the prototype of all the contemporary lonely deaf fictional characters. McCullers achieves a powerful sense of irony when Singer, who has lost his only deaf friend, becomes the confidant of all the other characters in the book because they assume he understands everything they say (he rarely answers, but simply nods in apparent understanding—the perfect sympathetic "listener"). As the reader, we know that Singer understands almost nothing (at one point, Jake Blount, one of the main characters, delivers a long diatribe on the plight of working people in the U.S., the Communist Party, and Blount's revolutionary passion. In response, Singer, guessing that Blount's long harangue has something vaguely to do with politics, asks Blount if he is a Democrat or a Republican).

That Singer misrepresents the experience of being deaf is clear to anyone familiar with the deaf community in the U.S. As an intelligent, relatively successful man, Singer would have many deaf friends. The deaf community is organized almost to a fault: deaf clubs, deaf churches, deaf teams, deaf schools, deaf theater, even deaf olympics and a Miss Deaf America. If there is a difference between deaf and hearing people in the U.S. in this regard, deaf people are probably more likely to be part of a closely-knit group than a hearing person.

The John Singer character found reincarnation as a female in the deaf heroine, Anna, of Susan Yankowitz's 1976 novel *Silent Witness*. Like Singer before her, Anna provides a convenient silence which other characters are free to interpret in their own way:

> He [Anna's lover] does not love her. The proof lies in this: he has never suggested that they study sign language together. Her silence gives him license. His is the triumph of imagination over flesh, fantasy embodied and undisturbed by protests or objections. She is a void that he endows, as others do their pets, with emotions, desires, and purpose.

This is precisely what Yankowitz herself does in the book, of course, and one feels uneasy that she seems unaware of how she is using the popular myth of the silence of deaf people to create a character that is completely unlike a living deaf person. (Anna has virtually no language, which would make her a complete incompetent, yet she is credited with profound insight.) If one is silent, other people speak for you (a stroke victim on TV complained that since his speech had been slowed, his wife always finished his sentences for him). In fact, one could speculate that the increased visibility of deaf characters in the last few years may be partly a result of the activism of other oppressed minorities (Blacks, women, children).

Joanne Greenberg, one of the most perceptive authors of popular literature dealing with deafness, notes how the hearing project their expectations onto deaf people in her short story "And Sarah Laughed," published in *Rites of Passage* (1966):

> Now they [Sarah and her deaf husband Matthew] had been married twenty-five years. It was a good marriage—good enough. Matthew was generous, strong, and loving. The farm prospered. His

*For a survey of literature about deaf people that includes works by deaf authors, see *The Deaf Experience* by Trenton W. Batson and Eugene Bergman, Merriam-Eddy, South Waterford, Maine 04081.

silence made him seem more patient, and because she became more silent also, their neighbors saw in them the dignity and strength of two people who do not rail against misfortune, who were beyond trivial talk and gossip; whose lives needed no words.

People who are silent can be manipulated and exploited. Perhaps it is that fact alone that makes deaf people attractive as fictional characters: the deaf community until the last few years has been less militant than other minority groups.

An extreme example of a writer taking license because of the silence of his subject is Paul West's *Words for a Deaf Daughter*. Though the book is not fiction, the pattern is similar to the books just mentioned. West has a daughter whose brain damage resulted in deafness and other disabilities. She is the subject of his 1968 book. In a January, 1971, book review that appeared in *Commentary,* Johanna Kaplan takes West to task for treating his daughter's disabilities so fancifully:

> West's notion of the handicapped child as having and being a special gift—she confers grace because she is out of the ordinary—not only suggests an eerie detachment but is profoundly misleading and simply untrue to life. It's the kind of book that can make people wish that they, too, had a 'special' child: it would lift them out of the humdrum, give them a chance to prove their sensitivity, and open them up to worlds of fascinating, unique experiences and 'exquisite perceptions.' All very much like having your own little artist-in-residence, or as Mr. West puts it, 'a small envoy to conventional minds.'

A reader followed up on this review three months later:

> As the father of a 'special' child I read Paul West's *Words for a Deaf Daughter* with special interest. Nowhere in it did I note the pattern of sleepless nights (try sleeping while a 'special' child performs some of his unique nocturnal aesthetic acts) or the sheer physical and psychological drain (try considering a life of never-ending diaper changes)—not to mention the constant marital strain, the escalating economic burden, the utter lack of the usual range of social freedoms, and all the other special adjustments besetting the members of a family faced with the problem. It is one thing to endure adversity, it is another to contrive saccharine celebration out of it. For life with a 'special' child is simply not a bowl of verbal cherries.

Most letters from readers, however, were sympathetic with West. To humans, nothing is more important than language. When it is absent, especially in our own child, we cannot resist putting it there. West explained, in a sequel to *Words:*

> On behalf of you [his fictional daughter], in your deafness, I spoke, as much in your absence as in your presence, shifting every now and then from plain talk into peacock bravery. And you rarely answered, hardly then having language although a coffer full of forbearing smiles. Response I found in your thrusty drawings done with a never uplifted fiber pen, in your big-lettered version of your name, even in the curved graph of your hearing loss, its abscissa the core of a brutal riddle.

Many authors have spoken "on behalf of" deaf people. Rarely have deaf people spoken on behalf of themselves: the number of deaf authors is tiny. As a result, descriptions of deaf characters are unrepresentative (or, in the cases where a deaf hero has fantastic lip-reading ability, the description is incredible), or the character is so fancifully embroidered that it is impossible to know the real person (as in *Words for a Deaf Daughter*). I won't even get into the various instances of the deaf character as a grotesque. (A recent example is Harry Crew's *The Gypsy's Curse*, in which the deaf narrator has no legs but huge arms, a hole in the top of his mouth that prevents him from speaking, and an uncanny ability to read lips; he is surrounded by other grotesque characters.) In most of these cases, there has been a minimum of research and a maximum of imaginative play.

One exception to this is Joanne

Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Fiction

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction with deaf characters shows a marked contrast in tone to that of the twentieth century. In those earlier centuries, deaf characters were made into saints. Writers then apparently knew that a group of people so different from "normal" people could not be accepted on their own terms. They had to be "cleaned up" and made to say the right things.

During the nineteenth century, even though by this time education for deaf people had been firmly established here and in Europe, there was still little recognition that deaf people could become part of society. The "happy" endings for deaf fictional characters of the nineteenth century came when they had a hearing child or married a hearing person—in other words, became "normalized" in some way.

So, even though deafness found its way into important fiction, the only message conveyed was that deaf people could never be acceptable if they remained deaf. (It was during this century that all countries interested in deaf education, except for the U.S., went on record as favoring the oralist method for deaf instruction—*i.e.*, forbidding the use of any visual means of communication in the classroom.) In the very idealization of their characters, writers such as Alfred de Musset, Charles Dickens, Ivan Turgenev and Guy de Maupassant reveal their own inability to tolerate differences among people. If one can not accept the racial or ethnic characteristics of a group, but feels the need to try, a solution is to change those characteristics into ideal attributes or to ignore them altogether. This was a familiar pattern in the 1960's in the U.S. when Black people, after having been reviled for centuries, suddenly experienced the sort of sanctification that deaf people did in nineteenth-century fiction.

The trouble with being sanctified (apart from its violation of fictional verisimilitude) is that it traps you; if you don't act like a saint you are treated with contempt. The hearing person is saying to the deaf person: "I will accept you, in spite of your deafness, but only if you are what I think you are." It's a double bind: live up to the expectations and you hate yourself; don't live up to the expectations, and the other person hates you.

Nineteenth-century writers who wrote about deaf people did not write about deafness. To them, deaf characters were convenient pulpits from which to excoriate the sins of the age. "These brave, affected souls, as hard a life as they have, still manage to live a moral, heroic life: Why can't you who have such a comparatively easy life also live up to high standards of human conduct?" Was this moralistic writing about deafness? Did it help the lot of deaf people? It hardly seems possible. Today, people still talk about how "rewarding" it must be to teach deaf people. Stereotypes die slowly.

Locating Books on Deafness

In the last five years, good bibliographies of literature dealing with deafness began to appear. The Gallaudet College Library, Washington, D.C. 20002 (202/651-5566 or TTY 5575) has, for years, maintained a "Deaf Collection" which is a real gold mine, although of uneven quality, since it serves as a repository of all fictional treatments of deafness. To search the collection by computer, the phone hook-up contact is Jim Bourg at the library (202/651-5573). No printed list is available, although a complete printout can be arranged. An annotated bibliography of selected treatments, prepared by Professor Daniel Nascimento of Gaullaudet, is included in *The Deaf Experience* (Merriam-Eddy, 1976). Titles published since 1977 can be obtained by writing to me, Trenton Batson, at Gallaudet.

For children's books dealing with deafness, there is *Notes from a Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying the Handicapped* by Barbara Baskin and Karen Harris (R.R. Bowker, 1977). This contains extensive annotations of 311 books of juvenile fiction published between 1940 and 1975.—T.B.

Greenberg's *In This Sign* (1970). This novel about a deaf couple, Janice and Abel Ryder, begins in the early part of the twentieth century. Conditions for deaf people at that time were terrible: deaf education was at best an afterthought and, when available, it was largely just another form of institutionalization (Gallaudet College being a notable exception). Jobs for deaf people were simply not available except in certain industries, such as printing. There was little public tolerance of deaf people, and they, like other minority groups in the U.S., lived as disenfranchised members of the society. As a result of these conditions, deaf people led very marginal lives. *In This Sign* shows that, without pulling any punches. So, the book is realistic, but it is realistic about a time that many deaf people would just as soon forget. For them, the story is *too* realistic, too depressing.

The two main characters from *In This Sign* appear again in a short story, "And Sarah Laughed," already mentioned. Sarah (Abel's hearing mother) has married a deaf man, Matthew (Abel's father) and given birth to four deaf sons. The deaf members of the family (everyone except Sarah) all learn to use their voices as a means of communicating simple information, but most of the time the house is silent. The boys' teachers teach them how to speak and to use some rudimentary English. But none of them learns any signs, so they are all largely noncommunicative.

Abel, the oldest of the boys, goes off to Chicago to work and meets and marries a deaf girl who has attended a deaf school and learned signs. She teaches Abel signs and when the new couple visits Sarah and Matthew, Sarah is horrified to see the signs. Suddenly the hearing mother is thrust into the position of a deaf person: communication that excludes her. For days Sarah keeps an icy distance from Janice (the new wife) who is teaching signs to everyone in the family, to their joy. Repeatedly, Sarah comes upon members of her family in animated signed communication only to see their faces go stiff and their hands drop when she appears. The story ends happily when Sarah decides that if she can't lick them, she will join them and begins to learn signs herself.

This story is one of the tiny number of stories about deaf people written for the general adult public that points to the central issue of sign language. Serious, intelligent authors such as Eudora Welty ("The Key"), Bernard Malamud ("Talking Horse"), Charles Dickens ("Doctor Marigold"), Ivan Turgenev ("Mumu"), Guy de Maupassant ("The Deaf Mute") and others who have used deafness as a major fictional focus rarely address the issue of sign language to any extent and yet this is *the* central issue of life for deaf readers. Without a means of communication, one can hardly be fully alive, and yet down through the centuries this most natural way for deaf people to communicate has been suppressed.

The *lingua franca* of America's large vital deaf community, American Sign Language (ASL), is a language unto itself, independent of English or any spoken language. It is not simply English words spelled on the hand, as many people seem to believe, or even the signed English that we see on TV now, but a fully-developed language of the visual mode, with its own linguistic elements and syntax. It is currently being studied by a number of distinguished linguists, who would now say that ASL is broadening our conception of what language is. In spite of the work of these linguists, the existence of ASL is disputed even by many who work with deaf people in a professional capacity. These "insiders" admit that deaf people use signs, of course, and that there is communication with the signs, but they argue that the signs do not constitute a language, only a cluster of gestures, and that they therefore interfere with language training in English.

ASL and Catch 22

Given these attitudes, ASL has lived an underground existence, not deemed worthy of serious attention (somewhat like English during the Norman control of England after 1066). Since there has not been a systematic study of ASL until recently, there was a kind of Catch-22 aspect to the suppression of ASL: without the systematic study there was no evidence that there *should* be systematic study. But just as Black English has finally achieved a degree of recognition, so ASL is finally coming into its own, and deaf people are beginning to have classes in ASL just as hearing people have classes in English.

For deaf people in the U.S., part of the real drama of the last quarter-century has been the battle over acceptance of their language, a battle symbolic of the acceptance of deaf people as they are, not as the majority population thinks they should be. With real acceptance will come new career possibilities and the wider acceptance of deaf people into society. But as long as deaf people are portrayed by hearing authors who know nothing of their actual experience or of their community, little progress can be made. □

About the Author

DR. TRENTON BATSON, Associate Professor of English and Director of the American Studies Program at Gallaudet College, received his doctorate in American Studies from The George Washington University. In 1971, he started the course "The Deaf in Literature," out of which grew the book, The Deaf Experience *(Merriam-Eddy), co-authored with Eugene Bergman.*

An analysis of children's books finds stereotypic, inaccurate and handicapist portrayals of deafness and deaf people. Books especially for deaf children are also found to be flawed.

Books Mirror Society: A Study of Children's Materials

By Albert V. Schwartz

In conjunction with the study of American Sign Language that begins on page 3, a study of children's books about deafness and/or about deaf people was undertaken. Also examined were books in signed English intended for deaf children.

In selecting books for this study, the following sources were consulted: *Children's Books in Print* (R.R. Bowker), *Bookfinder* (American Guidance Service), *Notes from a Different Drummer* (R.R. Bowker) and The New York Public Library reference lists. Assistance was also provided by the children's librarians at the Donnell Branch of The New York Public Library. Books from organizations that publish materials for deaf children (Gallaudet College, National Association of the Deaf and the Alexander Graham Bell Association) were also consulted. In all, more than 70 titles, including over 50 books in signed English, were analyzed.

In evaluating the books, input was secured from a group of deaf reviewers including Pedro Acevedo, Glenn Anderson, Alan R. Barwiolek, Joe Guss, J. Charlie McKinney, Mary Beth Miller, Dominick Morrero, Martin Sternberg and Guy Wonder. Additional assistance was provided by Janet Acevedo. Criteria for evaluating books about disabilities (see the *Bulletin*, Vol. 8, Nos. 6 & 7) and the criteria offered on page 21 were also used.

In general, the books were found to convey handicapist attitudes and stereotypic and inaccurate depictions of deafness and hearing impairment. At least in part because all but one of the titles were written by hearing people, most of them exhibit one or more of the following flaws:

- Deaf people are frequently presented as isolated from both the hearing world and the deaf community.
- Deafness is frequently the plot of the book; *i.e.*, action revolves around a character's deafness and his/her response to the disability, as well as the response of others.
- Many books give an inaccurate picture of deafness, presenting it, for example, as something that can always be "cured" by a hearing aid or else as a completely silent world.
- Books sometimes describe handicapist behavior (ridicule by hearing people, etc.) but it is presented as an individual response rather than a societal problem.
- The oral method is presented as the best or only way for deaf people to communicate. Few books mention sign language; those that do are often vague about the signing system used (describing it only as a graceful waving of the hands, for example).
- No book mentions or discusses American Sign Language or its role and importance in the deaf community.
- Books are often elitist and present families who can afford special schooling and equipment—not to mention unlimited attention—for their children.
- Books do not reflect the racial diversity of the deaf community. Excluding the books in signed English, only one book examined is about a Third World child—and it is racist.

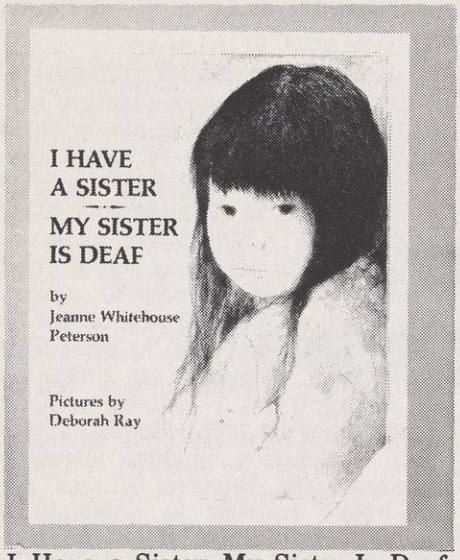
Reviews of the books follow.

Books for Young Readers

Many books about deafness and hearing impairment focus on hearing aids. One example is *A Button In Her Ear* by Ada B. Litchfield (Whitman, 1976). Of course, the book has nothing to do with buttons; calling a hearing aid a "magic button" is a misleading, cutesy euphemism. The book also misrepresents hearing impairment. The young girl who has a hearing impairment looks at the angry face of a boy and mistakes his statement, "Just wait. I'll get you for this," for "Just wait. I'll give you a kiss." Such a mistake is unlikely, particularly since deaf children can read body language as well as anyone else. Two pluses: the young girl does have a positive attitude about her hearing impairment (it's not the end of the world) and about wearing a hearing aid (it's a good thing to have if you need it). Another plus is that one of the doctors she sees is a woman—and Black.

I Hear The Day by Catherine D. Johnston (Merriam-Eddy, 1977) is another story about a hearing aid. It compares the hearing aid a young boy uses to his father's eyeglasses, an inaccurate comparison since it is only rarely that a hearing aid will give a person perfect hearing in the way that glasses "give" 20/20 vision. For deaf people with severe hearing loss, hearing aids will only amplify very loud sounds; they will not make speech audible.

Several books reflect the myth that deaf people live in a silent world (in reality, most deaf people have some



I Have a Sister: My Sister Is Deaf, *which discusses deafness from a hearing person's perspective, is one of the better books for younger readers.*

residual hearing). Three books whose titles reinforce the myth are *Lisa and Her Soundless World* by Edna S. Levine (Human Sciences, 1974), *My Sister's Silent World* by Catherine Arthur (Childrens Press, 1979) and *Anna's Silent World* by Bernard Wolf (Lippincott, 1977). In spite of its title, *Lisa* contains good information about deafness, hearing aids and finger spelling. *My Sister's Silent World* does explain that Heather hears sounds and that her hearing aid helps her to hear them better. One nice touch is that the book shows the sisters using sign language when speaking to each other. *Anna* depicts a young girl from an upper-middle-class background; the advantages she has—and her family's life style—will not be relevant to most deaf children. In addition, the book calls the oral method "the best way" for deaf children to learn to communicate; neither the needs of children who are unsuccessful with the oral method nor the advantages of total communication are mentioned. (All but one of the books examined for this article have a middle- or upper-middle-class setting; there were no stories about poor children or about the financial costs of some of the "solutions" mentioned. All of the stories—except one—were about white children; the racial diversity of the deaf community is not reflected in children's books.)

Claire and Emma by Diana Peter (John Day, 1976) is about two deaf sisters. Their mother—who seems to be a single parent—has unlimited time to work and play with the girls, and the family lives in an idyllic country setting. One of the girls goes to school in a taxi, something that is perhaps explained by the book's British setting, although this is not mentioned in the text. The author is in actuality the mother of the two girls—which might account for the touch of reality in the scene in which the mother gets angry at the girls for being messy at breakfast. Both Claire and Emma are being taught the oral method and use a small machine called a "speech trainer" which is not widely used in the U.S., especially not in the home. The two girls are never shown communicating with each other—something that would be possible if they were taught sign language. The author states rather condescendingly that "Claire and Emma like doing just the same things as other children, and they like people to be friendly and talk with them so that they don't feel left out." In a sense, hearing people are being asked to be kind to deaf people.

Several titles already mentioned are purportedly written by the siblings of deaf children. (These siblings are inevitably depicted as having great understanding and empathy; sibling rivalry is non-existent.) Another such work is *I Have a Sister: My Sister Is Deaf* by Jeanne Whitehouse Peterson (Harper & Row, 1977). It, too, discusses deafness from the hearing child's perspective without revealing the feelings and perspectives of the deaf child. Its depiction of deafness is, however, more accurate and less stereotypic than most titles. This well written and beautifully illustrated book deserves a place on the bookshelf, but it does point up the acute need for presenting the deaf person's own perspective.

Deaf Characters in Isolation

The books examined almost all depict deaf people in isolation, rather than interacting with other deaf people. The sole exception occurs in *The Mystery of the Boy Next Door* by Elizabeth Montgomery Rider (Garrard, 1978). Several children investigate the "mystery" of a boy who pays no attention to them. When they stand right near him, he is totally unaware of them. When they stare at him while he watches TV, he does not see them. The mystery is solved when the children discover the boy is deaf. These situations are not realistic since deaf children, like everyone else, would notice other children nearby or staring at them. On the plus side, the young boy uses sign language (he even wears a tee shirt showing the manual alphabet) when he talks to his mother, who is also deaf. This is the only instance of interaction between two deaf people in any of the books examined.

Several books imply that instant friendship occurs when hearing children discover that another child—previously seen as mysterious or annoying—is deaf. *The Mystery of the Boy Next Door,* discussed above, is an example of the first type. *The Boy Who Couldn't Hear* by Freddy Bloom (Bodley Head, 1977) spins a similar tale. When two hearing boys who are fishing are disturbed by a deaf child fishing nearby, they chase him in anger. The mother of the deaf boy explains to the other two boys that her son is deaf. All is immediately well and the next time the children meet they are "friends." Life is not that simple, particularly for deaf children in a hearing world.

Blaming the Victim?

The Girl Who Wouldn't Talk by Cheryl and Jim Goldfeder (National Association of the Deaf, 1973) seems to put the blame for not talking upon the little girl, Robin. Actually, it isn't that Robin "wouldn't" talk but rather that she hadn't learned how to speak because she is deaf and had never heard speech. Robin does not get a hearing aid like most other children in these books. Instead, she goes to a residential school for deaf children where she instantly learns the manual alphabet and is able to communicate with the other children. On the plus side, this book depicts children with hearing impairments in a warm, friendly school atmosphere. It's unfortunate that Robin gets taken to school without any explanation from her parents so that the leave-taking is sad and mysterious. It's also unfortunate that the book's introduction is apologetic about signing and that the story is so simplistic.

Another book by the same authors (writing as Cheryl and Jim Pahz) is *Robin Sees A Song* (National Association of the Deaf, 1977); it is a fantasy in which a song appears to Robin in a dream and attempts to teach her that you don't have to be able to hear in order to "sing a song." The message is

not clear—and what most children either hearing or deaf will make of this surrealistic tale is anybody's guess.

Book Ridicules Deafness

Wilson Gage's *Down in the Boondocks* (Greenwillow Books, 1977) is a nasty book that ridicules "an old farmer" who is deaf and uses an ear trumpet. Written in a phoney folk tale style that rings false with every line, this book has no literary or artistic merit. Its handicapist attitudes—not to mention its misrepresentation of deafness (the farmer, who is deaf in one ear "for most of the year," is totally unaware of what goes on around him)—make it a poor choice for any library.

A major stereotype about deaf people is that they are angry and frustrated because they cannot hear. Deaf people may indeed become angry at the hearing world's impatience and discrimination, but to focus on deaf people simply as "angry" is to avoid the real issue. *Jamie's Tiger* by Jan Wahl (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) depicts the anger a deaf person *supposedly* feels. Jamie, who is partially deaf after having German measles, becomes lonely and moody. His hidden angers are personified by his toy tiger. However, by becoming superior—learning finger spelling, spotting a nest of rabbits *before* anyone else, becoming "a terrific dancer" and learning to play a new bongo drum—he is once again accepted by his friends. This is the same message society gives other oppressed minorities—"Be superior in some way if you want to be accepted as an equal." Why should a deaf person be required to "perform" for friends or to do something better than anyone else? (The book does have a positive anti-ageist image of Jamie's grandmother riding a bicycle.)

While it is important to depict the accomplishments of deaf people, care should be taken to avoid doing this in such a way as to make hearing impaired people feel that they *must* be superior. An emphasis on super heroes can contribute to the poor self-esteem of a child who feels unable to accomplish as much as a super achiever. Books about such super heroes as Helen Keller can also create unrealistic expectations on the part of hearing people.

Children of the Silent Night by

Criteria for Analyzing Books about Deafness

Note: Readers are also referred to the guidelines on the depiction of disabled people that appeared in the special *Bulletin* on handicapism—Vol. 8, Nos. 6 & 7.

- Does the book present an accurate picture of deafness or does it include stereotypes and misinformation—*e.g.,* deafness as a "silent world," deafness as a condition in which people mistake one word or sound for another, deafness as a state of isolation from the mainstream of the hearing world?
- Is the deaf character shown interacting with other deaf children and/or adults or is the deaf character isolated? Are deaf adults who could serve as role models depicted?
- Is deafness presented as "the end of the world" or as something to be ashamed of?
- Does a deaf person have to be superior or perform an extraordinary deed to be accepted?
- Is the plot focussed entirely on the problem of deafness or is deafness presented as one facet of a character's life? Are the realities of deaf people's lives shown—work, education, interaction with other deaf and/or hearing people, family responsibilities, contributions to society, etc?
- Does the book reflect the diversity of the deaf community or does it show only people of one race, sex or age (usually children)?
- Is the responsibility to communicate put entirely on the deaf person or is this responsibility shared by the hearing world?
- Are occupational stereotypes—printer, bench worker, piece worker, key puncher (for women only)—shown?
- Is deafness treated as a joke? Are deaf people ridiculed in any way?
- Is the oral method presented as "the answer" for deaf people or are other options for communication such as ASL discussed?
- Is ASL presented as a language with a cultural base or is it labeled "broken English," "deaf English" or a "short cut" to communications?
- Does the book present options such as private tutors or speech therapy that are too costly or unrealistic for most families?
- Is stereotypic or demeaning language used—deaf and dumb, deaf and mute, stone deaf, etc.
- Are the books racist, sexist, ageist or otherwise biased? (Guidelines that identify such stereotypes are available from the Council.)

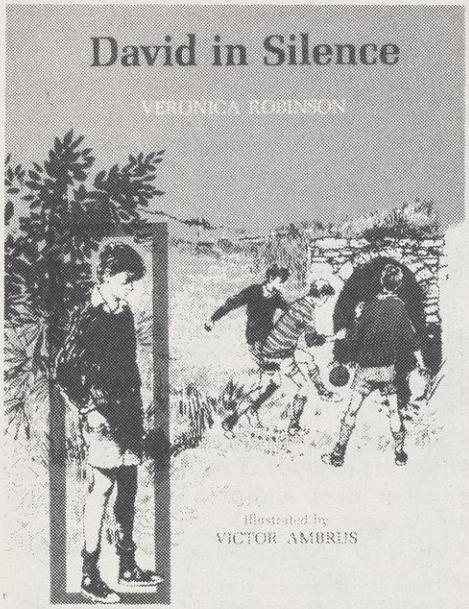
Checklist for Story Books in Sign Language*

- Is the narrator always a man, even if it is not relevant to the story?
- Are the signs clear enough to be understood by a child?
- Is the vocabulary appropriate to the child's age level and relevant to a child's needs?
- Is the story racist, sexist, handicapist, ageist or otherwise discriminatory?

*Materials are presently available in signed English; nothing is available for children in ASL.

What We'd Like to See in Children's Books

- Deaf people as independent and productive adults, part of the working world successfully doing the variety of jobs they do in "real life."
- Deaf people with family dimensions; *i.e.,* deaf children who make contributions to the family, deaf adults who are shown as parents, etc.
- Deaf people interacting with both deaf and hearing people in social clubs, organizations, etc., and exhibiting a range of emotions—not just angry, frustrated, paranoid or taking things literally (the common stereotypes).
- ASL depicted as an important aspect of communication.
- Deaf people with varying degrees of hearing loss—and with varying abilities to communicate.
- Deaf people shown with interpreters, using TTY's, having doorbell lights and phone lights, driving cars, etc.
- Deaf people struggling for their civil rights, engaged in protest demonstrations, involved with groups working for a new society.
- Books written by deaf people that convey the realities of being part of a cultural minority.



The cover of David in Silence *depicts a deaf character in isolation. Too many children's books repeat this theme of a deaf child separated from both the hearing world and the deaf community.*

Edith Fisher Hunter (Dell, 1963) is about Laura Bridgman, the first recorded blind and deaf child to be educated in the U.S. Her education was a model for Helen Keller's, and her story will interest young readers and help them understand the difficulties of learning a language when one cannot hear.

There are many children's stories about the life of Helen Keller for young readers. Helen Keller's own *The Story of My Life* (Doubleday, 1954), with her description of how she first learned that there were such things as words, is a treasure of literature that all children should know. It also should be known that she was a social and political activist, but none of the children's books about her mention her social ideals or those of her teacher, Anne Sullivan.

Some of the more interesting biographies of Helen Keller for young children are Margaret Davidson's *Helen Keller* (Scholastic, 1969), Catherine Owens Pease's *The Helen Keller Story* (T.Y. Crowell, 1959) and Helen Elmira Waite's *Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Marcy* (Macrae Smith, 1959), which includes the story of a great teacher. (Other books about Helen Keller are discussed in the *Bulletin* on handicapism—Volume 8, Nos. 6 & 7.)

One of the only books that attempts to portray the lives of "ordinary" deaf people is *I'm Deaf Too* by Frank Bowe and Martin Sternberg (National Association of the Deaf, 1973). It is also one of the only books about deaf adults, and since many deaf children never meet deaf adults who can serve as role models, this book fills an important need as it presents 12 deaf people who work in diverse occupations.

Unfortunately the book is both sexist and racist. Only three women are interviewed. The first—who opens the book—is Miss Deaf America, an unfortunate choice when women are protesting beauty contests that present them as objects. The second woman—a teacher who is labeled "The Deaf Woman"—presents a strongly anti-feminist view point; she even says that "women's lib has gone too far." Only the third woman, who is a TV newscaster, is a positive, nonsexist role model, but unfortunately she does not discuss sexism in a way that counters the rest of the book.

The only Third World person in the book does not discuss racism or how it affects Third World people who are deaf. Instead, he seems to "blame the victim." He states, "Black deaf professionals are in demand. But you must be able to do the job. *Too few black deaf people are ready for these jobs"* (emphasis added).

Books for Older Readers

Books for older readers—like most of those for younger children—present deaf characters in isolation. The deaf person—inevitably a child—is never depicted interacting with another deaf child or a deaf adult. In these books, too, a character's deafness is often the plot.

A Single Light by Maia Wojciechowska (Harper & Row, 1968) reflects an early attitude of the Catholic Church that deafness was a punishment and that deaf people were evil because they could not hear the word of God. Anna, who is described as "deaf and dumb," is the child of a Spanish peasant woman who dies soon after childbirth. (The townspeople say that the mother died of embarrassment at having such an unnatural child.) Anna is rejected by her father and despised by the townspeople. She takes care of a baby who becomes sick and dies, and the townspeople believe that Anna is responsible. Unfortunately, the author suggests that this is due to the poverty and superstition of the townsfolk rather than that they have learned well the lessons the Church taught them.

A priest and a visitor from the U.S. each think they know what will be best for Anna (of course, no one asks Anna what she wants). Through a complicated series of events, the book ends with Anna apparently accepted by the townspeople; but none of the basic questions raised by the book have been answered. (To add to the book's handicapism, another character is a nameless "hunchback," whom the townspeople eventually kill in anger—"The hunchback, who worked in the church, never worried about his soul.")

The stereotype that deaf people are frightening is found in *Journey from Peppermint Street* by Meindert DeJong (Harper & Row, 1968). Young Siebren discovers that he has an uncle who is deaf. At first he is afraid of his uncle, but when he sees his very big uncle walking with his very small aunt he laughs and feels that he has nothing to fear. Later, the uncle saves a dog that Siebren has found. His aunt says, "Do you think your deaf-and-dumb uncle would let a dumb animal suffer like that—he dumb himself?" (Several books compare deaf people to animals. This is not too different from the religious concept that hearing and speaking make us human, and that lack of hearing or speaking make us like animals.) The book does depict the aunt and uncle using "finger speaking"; it is one of the few books that contains any reference to sign language.

M.E. Kerr's *Is That You, Miss Blue?* (Harper & Row, 1975) ridicules a deaf person. The story is set in an Episcopalian school for girls where the students are quite sophisticated and intelligent, all, that is, except for Agnes who is deaf. She is depicted as extremely beautiful, but she is an object of ridicule because she doesn't speak clearly and because she punches people—out of frustration, the reader might assume, since the author doesn't explain this behavior. (She is also very noisy and snores loudly in her sleep.) In one incident the girls fix Agnes up with a "blind date"—a handsome boy who is actually blind. She refuses to go out with him. The blind boy's feelings about the date and being turned down by Agnes are not mentioned. The book is well written, but too much of it is a "sick joke."

David in Silence by Veronica Robinson (Lippincott, 1965) also shows a deaf person in isolation. David, who is deaf, antagonizes the boys he is playing soccer with by trying too hard and showing off. When they chase him he runs into a tunnel and makes a long journey to the other side. When the boys discover that he has gone through this tunnel that they fear, their antagonism changes to acceptance. This is another instance of a deaf person having to do an extraordinary deed in order to be accepted as an equal.

Hiding Deafness

The children who are deaf in *The Nothing Place* by Eleanor Spence (Harper & Row, 1972) and *A Dance to Still Music* by Barbara Corcoran (Atheneum, 1974) both run away rather than go to a school with other deaf children. In *The Nothing Place* Glenn tries to hide his deafness from his friends and teachers. In his resistance to accepting his deafness Glenn states, "Do you expect me to talk in sign language or something?" It's a pity this issue is brushed aside and not discussed. Glenn also rejects a hearing aid that his friends want to buy him. The author provides no insight as to why Glenn feels the way he does (his friends and teachers are *all* depicted as very understanding). By ignoring society's handicapist attitudes such books can only encourage deaf children to feel that they are at fault.

A Dance to Still Music presents yet another deaf child in isolation. Fourteen-year-old Margaret would rather run away from home than go to a school with other deaf children. She intends to hitch hike from Florida back to her former home in Maine. While on the road she finds a hurt fawn and is taken in by Josie, an older, understanding woman who takes care of her and the fawn. At book's end Margaret is allowed to stay with Josie while she attends an experimental workshop combining "speech reading, natural sign language" and other methods. The workshop is presented as some kind of instant cure that will enable Margaret to communicate, and the issue of deafness—and Margaret's feelings about having become deaf—are never really resolved. The book is also quite unrealistic. The dangers of hitch hiking, for example, are never mentioned; few runaways—deaf or hearing—would be as lucky as Margaret.

A deaf person plays a minor role in *A Horse Called Mystery* by Marjorie Reynolds (Harper & Row, 1964). The hero is nicknamed "Owlie" because he wears glasses (he also limps); Owlie's mother is deaf (she is called "stone deaf" and a "deaf mute") and although not much is made of this fact, she does communicate with her family through finger spelling. Another character, Doctor Delafield, has a face that has been badly burned. Each of these people is extremely noble: Owlie helps people, his mother is super kind (which she frequently demonstrates by preparing food for her family) and Dr. Delafield is ready to treat anyone who needs help, even though he is afraid to let people see his face. In this simplistic tale, all ends well, and even the villains—including those who ridicule Owlie—turn out to have good hearts.

The most recent book for this age group, *The Swing* by Emily Hanlon (Bradbury, 1979), is one of the best. It is the only title that does not use deafness as the plot of the story. In a nicely anti-sexist story, twelve-year-old Emily (who is deaf) saves the life of a young boy. She also wages a successful fight to protect some wild bears. Although not the focus of the story, deafness is presented realistically. For example, although Emily is a successful user of the oral method, the book does note that deaf people have varying abilities to speech read and speak. Anther positive point is that Emily is shown interacting with other people, not in isolation.

A Racist Work

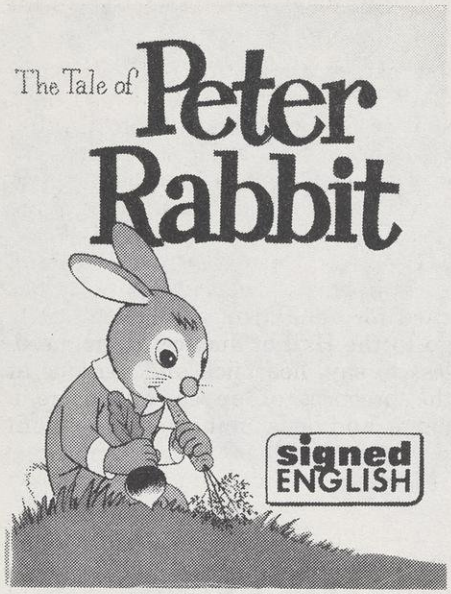
There is one book about a deaf Black child, P.L. Travers' *Friend Monkey* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971). It is, however, one of the most offensive works, being both handicapist and racist. An African child of the "Fan tribe" (a group apparently invented by the author) is abandoned by his parents because he is deaf. Saved from crocodiles by a British hunter, he is brought to England. His deafness is misrepresented ("being deaf, he was also dumb," states the book) and to add insult to injury, he is described in racist terms. (When the child meets the monkey that is the star of the tale, the "black and brown hugged each other as though they were long-lost brothers." In another incident, the young boy is mistaken for the monkey in what is supposedly an amusing scene.)

Although not the focus of the plot, deafness is presented accurately in The Swing. *This is one of the best books for older readers.*

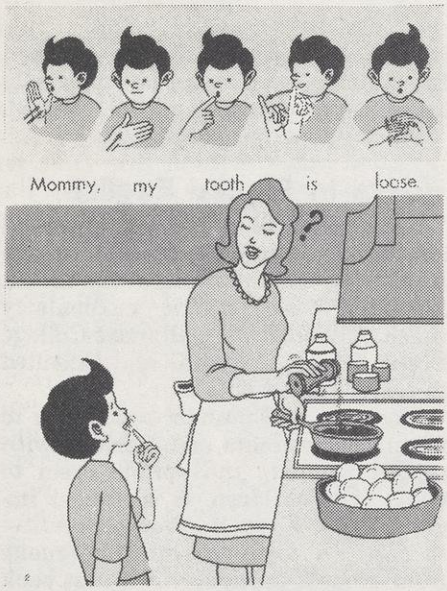
Books in Signed English

In addition to the books analyzed above, more than 50 sign language books for children were examined. Most of these books, particularly those published by Gallaudet College Press, are instructional and intended to teach signed English.

Most of the Gallaudet books seek to familiarize parents and teachers with signed English *and* enable them to teach it to children. It is almost impossible for anyone—even an adult—to learn a visual-gestural language from a book, particularly if that book shows only the hands in isolation as these frequently do. Children, on the other hand, are faced with the difficult task of learning English vocabulary and signs simultaneously. Although not a stated goal, the books also seem to be teaching pronunciation; many of the illustrations attempt to show the position of the mouth saying a particular word. (The books' introductions do state that signed English is meant to *supplement* speech.) A further problem is that because the books stress English



Many books in signed English retell classic stories but, like The Tale of Peter Rabbit *(above), they do not exhibit the artistic and literary quality of the originals. Books like* Bobby Visits the Dentist *(below) convey sexist messages.*



structure and vocabulary, they frequently do not use sign language accurately—*i.e.*, by giving a one-to-one translation of sign to English word, they often do not use the single sign that would more accurately convey the concept. (For example, there is a single sign that conveys the concept "to get up," but one of the books uses the sign for "get" that means receive plus the directional sign for up. This is visually confusing as well as conceptually inaccurate.)

The Gallaudet books fall into four categories: 1. stories and poems, including such familiar tales as *Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, The Night Before Christmas* and *Mother Goose*; 2. "Growing Up Books," with such titles as *The Holiday Book, Mealtime at the Zoo* and *Happy Birthday Carol*; 3. "Beginning One Books" with such titles as *A Book About Me* and *Count and Color*; and 4. "Beginning Two Books" with such titles as *I Am a Kitten* and *Things I Like to Do.*

All books are in color with simple cartoon-like illustrations. In most books the text is accompanied by word-by-word signed English illustrations. Most include information for parents and teachers, some of which seems extraneous and confusing.

It must be pointed out that neither the writing nor the illustrations are of the quality one finds in standard children's books. The familiar tales in particular have been told and retold so often and so well—and illustrated so beautifully—that one could hardly expect to interest children with these amateurish works.

Sexism Evident

The books have other drawbacks as well. Many are sexist. For example, in *Bobby Visits the Dentist*, the dentist is male (as are all of the doctors in this series), the nurse is female and Bobby's mother is shown only in a traditional role—cooking, caring for Bobby, etc. In *Cars and Trucks and Things* the school bus, city bus, fire engine, police car, moving van, dump truck, tow truck, taxi, motorcycle, ice cream truck, sports car, garbage truck and mail truck are all driven by men; the lone adult female is "Mommy," who drives a station wagon while taking the children for a ride. *Policeman Jones* makes an attempt to offer a non-sexist role by including a policewoman, but the police*man* does all of the active things while *she* helps children and radios in an accident.

Some books attempt to be non-racist by tinting some of the faces dark brown—but racism is still apparent. All of the families, for instance, are white and few Black adults are shown. Native Americans appear only in stereotypical fashion as part of the Thanksgiving illustration. Puerto Ricans, Chicanos and Asian Americans are completely omitted.

The Signed English Dictionary For Preschool and Elementary Level edited by H. Bornstein et al. (Gallaudet College Press, 1975) is the only existing children's dictionary and therefore of value, but the illustrations frequently show only hands or expressionless faces. Hands shown in isolation—particularly without facial expressions—are not accurate representations of signs.

Three work books by Frank Caccamise and Carolyn Norris are intended for children and others beginning to learn signed English—*Community in Signs, Home in Signs* and *Animals in Signs* (Alinda Press, 1979). Unfortunately, the books are quite amateurish. The illustrations are so poorly done as to be confusing, and sometimes they are not correct. For example, in *Home in Signs*, the sign for the word "glass" appears to start at the forehead and move down to chest level. The sign should be made in front of the body in reverse order from chest to mouth (rather than eye) level.

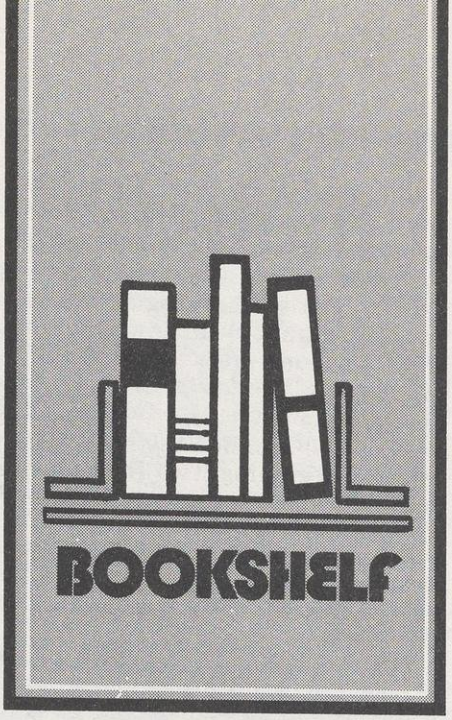
Handtalk: An ABC of Finger Spelling and Sign Language by Remy Charlip, Mary Beth Miller and George Ancona (Parents' Magazine Press, 1974) shows how much more meaning can be conveyed when a signer's face and body are included. The exuberant photos of a variety of people—different races, ages and types—make this a most appealing book. Large photos illustrate signs (but why include the stereotypic word "crazy"?) while the English words are fingerspelled in the top and bottom margins. It would be nice to see a book like this totally devoted to ASL.

It is apparent from the reviews that most available books about deafness are handicapist; they reinforce negative stereotypes and give a misleading picture of the options available to deaf people. It is, therefore, important that librarians, teachers, parents and others selecting or recommending relevant books analyze a book's content and messages. With an increased awareness of disability rights in general and the concerns of deaf people in particular, it is to be hoped that future books will present the perspectives of deaf people and more accurately reflect their concerns. □

About the Author

DR. ALBERT V. SCHWARTZ is Associate Professor of Language Arts, College of Staten Island, CUNY.

In the BOOKSHELF, a regular *Bulletin* department, all books that relate to minority themes are evaluated by members of the minority group depicted.—Editors.



The Lilith Summer

by Hadley Irwin.
The Feminist Press, 1979,
$7.95, 109 pages, grades 8-up

Older people and very young people are oppressed in some of the same ways. Lilith, seventy-seven, and Ellen, twelve, discover this in *The Lilith Summer*. Both have been tricked in the same way. Ellen's mother has arranged for her to receive $15 a week for "lady-sitting" for Lilith. Lilith believes that she is babysitting for Ellen; she, too, earns $15 a week. Neither enjoys the other to begin with, but when they discover the treachery, Lilith and Ellen form an alliance to trick the oppressor. They continue to spend their days together, and they continue to collect their pay. At the end of the summer Ellen will have earned her ten-speed bike, Lilith her new screens.

In spite of themselves, they become great friends. They share learning experiences: reading Sherlock Holmes, writing poetry, inventing their own language, birdwatching, canoeing. Even more important in Ellen's education, Lilith displays compassion, honesty and courage in some important episodes. Another part of Ellen's education is coming to know three of Lilith's friends, also older people, as the complex individuals they are. It takes a long time for Ellen to accept the fact that Lilith and Mr. Cummings next door love each other.

In one scene Lilith and Ellen visit a woman at a nursing home where old people are treated condescendingly. Ellen and Lilith agree that it is like "a school for old children . . . to unlearn how to live." Again the institutional oppression of children and older people appears similar. Ellen sees that much of the pain and loneliness of old age comes from societal oppression. It doesn't have to be that way.

But a certain amount of pain and loneliness are part of reality. An old person's friends do die one by one. She can no longer do all of the things she could once do. Ellen learns from Lilith the necessity of acceptance of reality. She tells Lilith that she wants to be like her some day. And Lilith seems to see life Ellen's way, too. When Ellen asks her what she would do differently if she could live her life again, Lilith says she would go barefoot more, would sit under willow trees, slam doors and forget about grammar.

This book is strongly anti-ageist and anti-sexist. It shows older people and females as strong, caring, growing individuals. [Anne G. Toensmeier]

A Different Ball Game

by Osmond Molarsky,
illustrated by James Zingarelli.
Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1979,
$5.95, 48 pages, grades 3-6

It may be a different ball game, but it's the same old story: Hispanic boy comes to the U.S., has a hard time adjusting to his new environment, gets into trouble and is saved by a white adult, this one in the guise of the local friendly policeman. True, there are some twists to the formula. First, Manolo is not Mexican or Puerto Rican, but Chilean. He is, in fact, the son of people who have been arrested because they spoke out against the political situation in Chile (this is why Manolo has been sent to live with his aunt in California). Second, Manolo's passion for sports resides not in baseball, but in soccer, very fitting for a child from South America.

The story itself is entertaining enough. Manolo, although innocent, is cited for vandalism and scheduled to go to the Hall of Justice. He is, needless to say, heartsick and nervous at the prospect of appearing before a judge, and he is unable to tell his aunt what happened. In the meantime, one day while walking home he meets a man who happens to be kicking a can. Instantly, Manolo senses that the man is a soccer player. They talk, become friends, and plan to meet soon to play together. When they do, Manolo convinces the man, Fred, that a boys' soccer team would be a good idea. Fred seems convinced and gives Manolo his phone number at work so that they can talk more about it. When Manolo and his aunt go to the Hall of Justice, lo and behold! his friend turns out to be the policeman in charge. Of course, explanations are given and accepted, Manolo and Fred remain friends, Manolo's aunt beams with pride, and there we have our happy ending.

The main problem with the book is that it offers simple and timeworn solutions to complex problems. How many Hispanic kids think of the cop on the beat as their friend? And why is it always whites who rescue Third World kids (shades of "The White Shadow")? To top it all off, Fred favors the idea of a soccer team because he says that boys tend to have "unused energy that gets them into trouble, drives them to destroy property." Not a word about the other driving forces in their lives, namely poverty and other forms of oppression.

In fact, although the story line can be a pleasant one, the trouble with it is that kids, particularly Third World kids, might very well mistake it for reality and internalize some of its negative messages. Maybe it's time we credit youngsters with the ability to understand and deal with complex issues. Taken in this light, *A Different Ball Game* is too neat, too contrived and too predictable. [Sonia Nieto]

Girls Are Girls and Boys Are Boys: So What's the Difference?

by Sol Gordon,
illustrated by Vivien Cohen.
Ed-U Press Inc. (Box 583,
Fayetteville, N.Y. 13066), 1979,
$3.95, unpaged, grades 1-4

Combining sex education and education against sex-role stereotypes, this marvelously illustrated soft cover book is a winner. Pointing out that differences between boys and girls lie in body build and function—not in play, toy, clothes or career choice—the book informs as it debunks behavioral myths. Masturbation, menstruation, intercourse, birth and breast feeding (but not homosexuality) are all lightly touched upon. The children and grown-ups depicted are multicultural. One is disabled. This is a very happy book which gets across some very complex messages in very simple form. [Lyla Hoffman]

Black Foremothers: Three Lives

by Dorothy Sterling,
illustrated by Judith Eloise Hooper.
The Feminist Press/McGraw-Hill,
1979,
$4.25 (paper), 157 pages, grades 7-up

Over the years, award-winning writer Dorothy Sterling has acquired a well-deserved reputation for careful research and honest and respectful treatment of materials dealing with the Black experience. These qualities are once again evident in this skillful evocation of the life and struggles of three heroic Black women: Ellen Craft, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell. Access to new sources of information has enabled Sterling to present information not previously available. Even if that were all, the book would still be a valuable contribution to the effort to properly illuminate and define the role of African-American women in the shaping of history. However, Sterling has used her considerable skills to present these women within the context of their times, not as reactors but as initiators of positive actions to secure their own liberation and that of other oppressed sisters and brothers.

The story of Ellen Craft's daring escape from slavery disguised as her husband's white Southern master has been told many times before. But here, painstakingly reconstructed from contemporary sources, is a fully rounded account that evokes the ofttimes painful experiences of the Black children of white slave masters. The impact of such racist legislation as the Fugitive Slave Law upon slaves and those escaped slaves working for the freedom of others is personalized in graphic detail.

The work of Ida B. Wells is set against the backdrop of the intensified racism in the era that has already been described as "The Nadir" of the Black experience in the U.S. Blacks fled for their lives from lynch mobs in Memphis hoping to find a better life in the Oklahoma Territory. Wells' role in encouraging Blacks to take part in this exodus is discussed, underscoring the great personal risks incurred by this intrepid woman. The role of Black women in supporting her efforts is also presented; it was, for example, a committee of 250 Black women that raised the funds to present Wells in her first major address against lynching.

Mary Church Terrell's long struggle against racism and sexism is well documented. The account of her changing positions toward the policies of Booker T. Washington provides an excellent historical frame of reference. So, too, does the discussion of the tension existing between Black and white leaders of women's organizations, a tension that arose over the refusal of white women suffragists to admit Black women's clubs to the National Women's Suffrage Association for fear of alienating Southern legislators and jeopardizing passage of the 19th Amendment.

This book is an important resource for all teachers interested in incorporating women's history into their curricula. Beautifully written, it would easily capture the interest of secondary school students as well as those on the college level. A chronology of key events in the life of each woman is provided as well as a table of selected events in Afro American history.

There are excellent photographs and pictures of important documents. The illustrations by Judith Hooper are strong and sensitive and do a great deal to enhance the book. This volume helps fill the information gap concerning the significant roles played by Afro American women in shaping their own history and the history of Afro Americans. Feminist Press and McGraw-Hill are to be congratulated on its production. [Beryle Banfield]

Tonweya and the Eagles

by Rosebud Yellow Robe,
illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.
Dial, 1979,
$7.95, 118 pages, grades 2-up

Tonweya and the Eagles is a collection of stories remembered and retold by Rosebud Yellow Robe, a member of the Lakota Sioux tribe. These stories are honestly and simply written to be easy and meaningful portrayals of Indian life, history and oral tradition. As is true of Indian story telling, each account has multiple levels of meaning and content. Although a knowledgeable adult could enhance these stories by discussing the different levels with children, the stories stand on their own merit.

The author has selected a very good variety of stories from what is surely a large collection of remembered accounts told to her by her

parents. They provide a direct means of understanding the significance of story telling as a way to pass on traditions in Indian cultures. [Eugene S. Rave and Beryl C. Gillespie]

When Megan Went Away

by Jane Severance,
illustrated by Tea Schook.
Lollipop Power (P.O. Box 1171, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514), 1979,
$1.85, 32 pages, grades 2-up

When Megan Went Away is about a special kind of separation—that of a child from her lesbian mother's lover, who is moving out of the house. It takes place on the first day after Megan has moved away, and Shannon, a child somewhere between seven and ten years old, returns home to become painfully aware of all of the manifestations of Megan's absence. On a wider scale, the story is about a lover moving away and about the end of a relationship, and one does not have to be a child to cry through every page of this enormously sensitive and perceptive story.

The strength of Jane Severance's book lies both in her gentle storytelling voice and her use of detail. She explores, with great empathy for a child's perceptions, how intimately we know someone we have shared a home with from the objects she has touched and from the daily rituals she has been a part of.

Through Shannon's eyes, we notice what is missing: a toothbrush, cinnamon-smelling shampoo, a plaid jacket and "a bright quilt . . . gone from the bed." As Shannon enters her own room, she also takes notice of what has remained—in the closet, a shirt sewn for her by Megan, and on her bed, Hunca-Munca and Flea-bit, two mice that Megan created for her. (One child I know liked the mice more than any other part of the story!)

As the day wears on, Shannon wonders who will help with her jigsaw puzzles, who will patch her jeans and how it will feel to eat breakfast alone after her mother has left for work. We become increasingly aware of how integrally Megan has become a part of her life. The author also includes appropriate emotional realities: the guilt Shannon feels about past acts against Megan, her fear that Megan has left because Shannon has not been "good" enough, and the fit of rage and frustration that she explodes into when finally overcome in the evening by her mother's silence and her own sadness. A particularly poignant detail is Shannon's guilt at not having wanted Megan to come to her school's Open House. As a teacher, I have encountered the difficulty a child has in acknowledging a lesbian mother to schoolmates, and it is not a problem easily overcome.

The final powerful moment is between mother and daughter as they sit in the dark, wrapped in a blanket, and slowly begin to cry. All through the story, each has been experiencing her sadness alone, and it is reassuring to watch them begin the impending difficult process with a sense of closeness and warmth.

A minor criticism of the book concerns the depiction of a lesbian lifestyle. The author and illustrator have both tried to create a realistic lesbian household, while attempting to counter certain stereotypes about lesbians. (For example, both Shannon's mother and Megan are portrayed with long hair rather than stereotypical close-cropped hair.) However, while women in a non-sexist lifestyle are always invaluable in a children's book, this book depicts an uncommonly liberated lesbian lifestyle, and it may not be relevant to even a good number of lesbian households.

For instance, Shannon's mother drives a bus, works in a women's center, and spends Saturday nights at a women's coffeehouse talking to women from her softball team who wear "Velvet Hammer" tee-shirts. (One reader commented that the only inconsistent detail was that Shannon and her mother eat regular—rather than vegetarian—hamburgers.) Perhaps the author and illustrator inserted these details to get a humorous, "in-joke" response from a lesbian audience; there *is* a pleasurable child-quality to Tea Schook's drawings, but they seem almost inconsistent with the story's more serious tone.

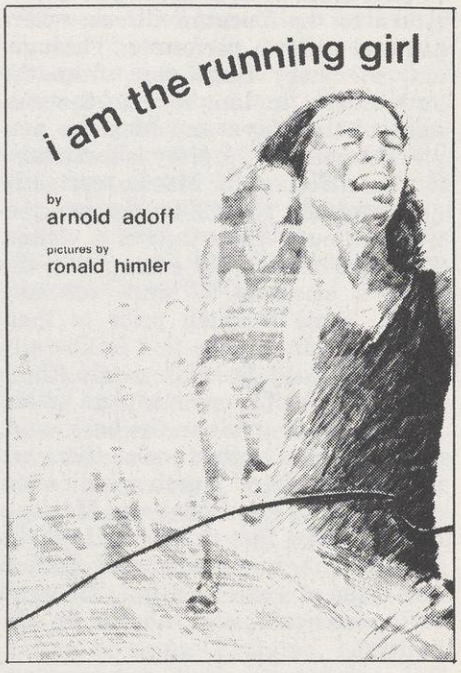
Overall, this problem did not detract from the impact and beauty of the story. For those who are part of a gay lifestyle, the story accurately captures and affirms the tender warmth that can exist in a non-traditional home, and all of the lesbians/mothers and children who read the book were tremendously appreciative.

For non-lesbian readers and/or children, the story can teach a great deal about humanness and intimacy between members of a family experiencing separation, reminding the reader that such experiences cross the lines of sexual preference. *When Megan Went Away* is a story that must be shared and read aloud to lovers, students, friends and relatives. Lollipop Power has done us all a great favor. [Leonore Gordon]

I Am the Running Girl

by Arnold Adoff,
illustrated by Ronald Himler.
Harper & Row, 1979,
$6.95, unpaged, grades 1-6

Slight in size but huge in spirit is this book of poetry about a girl who loves to run. In a supportive family of sports enthusiasts, this girl has chosen running as her particular love, her dedication, her joy. Adoff, in his effective free verse, and Himler, in his moving soft pencil art, present a splendid young woman who is a com-



petitive athlete, a good friend to other athletes of both sexes, a warm family member and—best of all—respectful of herself, her body and her strength. Multicultural cast. Feminist message. Fine merger of poetry, content and art. [Lyla Hoffman]

El Circo Magico Modelo/ Finding the Magic Circus

written and illustrated
by Macduff Everton.
Carolrhoda Books (241 First Ave. N., Minneapolis, Minn. 55401), 1979,
$7.95, unpaged, grades p.s.-4

The oft-repeated truism that we write best about what we've experienced once again holds true. In this case we have a story based on the real-life experiences of the author and his son. It tells about a summer trip to Mexico to visit old friends of the father and to return to the Yucatán Circus, where he used to be a performer. Throughout, the story rings true, from the authenticity in language to the customs of the Maya and Mexican people. Permeating the story is a sensitivity and affection for Mexico, certainly not from the typical tourist perspective, although from that of a visitor. This can be seen, for example, in the father's attempts to teach his son, Ricky, some Spanish prior to their trip. In addition, the text is liberally sprinkled with Spanish words (there is a glossary of terms complete with a pronunciation guide in the back) and, unlike so many other books, there are no mistakes here! Another indication of the author's sensitivity to Mexican culture is the fact that he did all the illustrations in the Huichol Indian technique of yarn painting. They are vivid, intricate and absolutely delightful.

Finally, the love between a father and his son, so seldom apparent in children's books, is captured here. Warmth and affection are freely shown and one gets the sense that both father and son are sharing a very special time. It is also clear from the text that Ricky's parents are separated and that he spends summers with his father. It is rare indeed to find a child in this situation portrayed as happy, adjusted and sharing pleasant experiences with a father. This story should provide a needed positive model for other children in similar situations.

It is unfortunate that the more exotic features of the culture are emphasized in the story (the circus, the "human torch" act, the pilgrimage to a holy place), while the day-to-day existence of the Mexican people is not really explored. Nevertheless, the book is beautifully done and sensitively presented, and it is certain to be treasured by both children and adults. [Sonia Nieto]

The Best Time of Day

by Valerie Flournoy,
illustrated by George Ford.
Random House, 1978,
$1.25, unpaged, grades p.s.-1

This book was evidently written to show the strengths of the Black family. This Black family, however, is a stereotypic "perfect nuclear family." In this book, nobody has any problems.

William is a young, happy boy with a dog, a cat and a goldfish. He goes to the doctor for check-ups. He doesn't like to clean his room. His mother goes to school part of the time and, when she's gone, William has a babysitter who takes him to the community center where he plays with other children. When she's not at school, William's mother makes breakfast, plays with him, takes him to the supermarket; she also takes William to visit his aunt and his newborn cousin. But the happiest time of day is when Daddy comes home. Daddy appears at the end of the book, carrying a briefcase and wearing a three-piece suit. He is cheerful to be arriving home from work with apparently nothing to do but to play with William while Mommy cooks dinner. Both Mommy and Daddy put William to sleep.

William also visits his grandparents when his parents are away. Grandpa tells him stories and Grandma happily "hums a soft song until it's time to go to bed" (in the accompanying illustration, Grandma is knitting and Aunt Debbie is sitting by her side giving a bottle to the baby). The book just exudes togetherness. If not totally sexist, it certainly has women locked into the major nurturing role, responsible for children 99 per cent of the time.

On the positive side, all of William's role models are Black (family, babysitter, doctor, supermarket cashier); on the negative side, there is nothing about the text or the illustrations that conveys Black culture. Children may like the book because it is so idyllic, but it portrays a Black child's world which is not distinguishable from the dominant white culture. [The Multicultural Project, Cambridge, Mass.]

The Lucky Stone

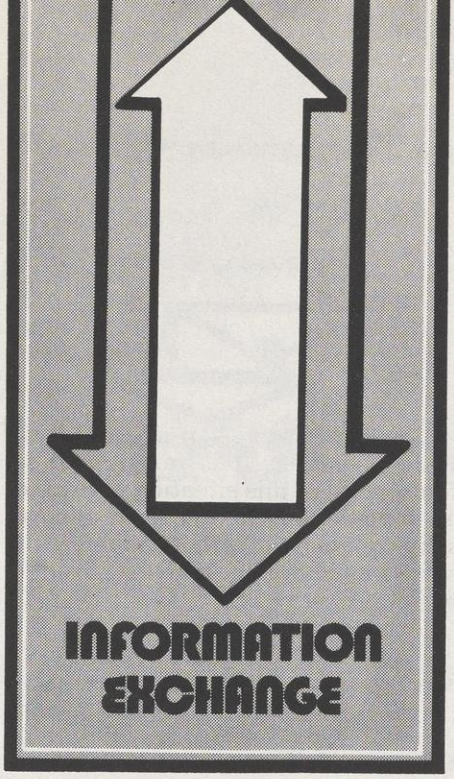
by Lucille Clifton,
illustrated by Dale Payson.
Delacorte Press, 1979,
$6.95, 64 pages, grades 3-5

Tee, a young Black girl, loves to hear her great-grandmother tell stories about a lucky stone and the luck of those who possessed the stone. The stone was originally found by a girl who was a runaway slave. She passed it on to her daughter who passed it on to Tee's great-grandmother, who in the end passes it on to Tee.

Lucille Clifton has written another really fine story for young children. The concept of past and present is usually hard for children to grasp but this book puts the passing of time in a perspective that children can understand both verbally and visually through Dale Payson's fine charcoal drawings.

This book contains information on various aspects of Black culture—slavery, religion and extended family—all conveyed in a way that is both positive and accurate.

This book is a must! [The Multicultural Project, Cambridge, Mass.]



New Directions for Women is a **feminist** newspaper with consciousness-raising and informative articles, book reviews, resources, interviews, etc. Articles on children's books and other materials appear regularly. The quarterly is $4/year for individuals, $7 for institutions. Write *New Directions for Women,* 223 Old Hook Road, Westwood, N.J. 07675.

Recreation for Disabled Persons describes a variety of programs that have been set up or adapted for **disabled people.** The 28-page booklet, which includes a list of resources, is available for 50¢ from the Public Affairs Committee, 381 Park Avenue S., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Women: An American History is a series of six sound filmstrips on the **history of women** in the U.S. Filmstrips include "Women of the New World," "The Fight for Equality," "Beyond the Vote" and "The Modern Women's Movement." Though it may have a little less about poor and Third World women than we would like to see, it is excellently produced and generally recommended. Available in discs, records and cassettes; send $86.95 to *Women: An American History,* Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, 425 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. A catalog of filmstrips is available from the same address.

A revised edition of *Television Awareness Training: The Viewer's Guide* is designed to help individuals and groups make TV viewing a more positive experience. **Stereotyping,** values and strategies for change are among the topics covered in this 280-page large-size paperback, and each chapter has exercises and games to assist viewers. Copies are available for $14.95 per copy plus $1 postage from Media Action Research Center, Suite 1370, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, N.Y. 10027.

PEER Perspective is a newsletter published by the Project on Equal Education Rights (PEER), a project of the NOW Legal Defense and Educational Fund. *PEER Perspective* reports on the group's monitoring activities of the enforcement progress under federal law forbidding **sex discrimination** in education, especially the Title IX regulation. The quarterly is free from PEER, 1029 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20005.

April Colloquium Announced

The North Carolina Central University School of Library Science will present its first Charlemae Hill Rollins Colloquium and dedicate two special library collections on April 20-21.

Charlemae Hill Rollins, a crusader against the stereotypical characterizations of Black people in books, was an author, teacher and children's librarian. The colloquium will include a panel of Ms. Rollins' friends and colleagues who will discuss her contributions and a second panel of contemporary Black writers who will discuss the Rollins legacy and its implications for the future.

The two special collections being dedicated are The William Tucker Collection of Works by Black Writers and Illustrators for Children and the Black Librarians' Collection.

People interested in attending the Colloquium or in receiving more information about it should write to Rollins Colloquium, School of Library Science, North Carolina Central University, Durham, N.C. 27707.

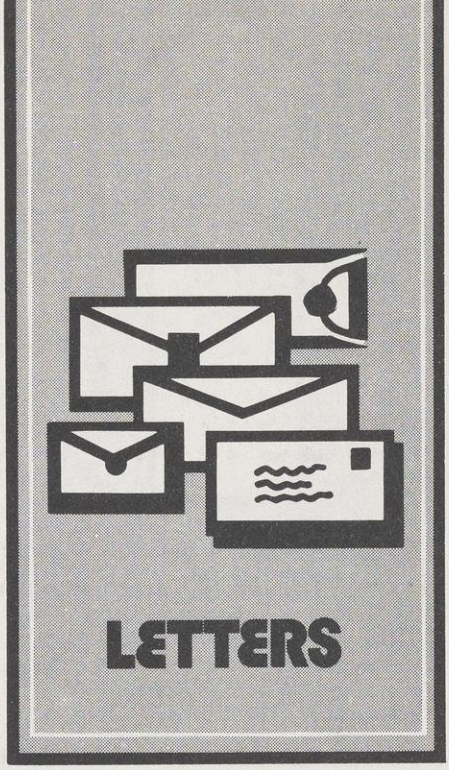
The ScRAPbook focuses on the needs of **disabled children in Head Start** programs and includes articles for both teachers and parents. The quarterly is sent free of charge to Head Start Programs in the West Virginia area and other interested individuals and agencies. Write Project PUSH/RAP, 39 South Mineral St., Keyser, W. Va. 26726.

A directory of **social change groups** working in the Southeast is being compiled by Tallahassee Science for the People. Groups working in such areas as human rights, women, minorities and education can obtain more information from the group by writing to them c/o Progressive Technology, P.O. Box 20049, Tallahassee, Fla. 32304.

Biblioteca Femina, A Herstory of Book Collections Concerning Women provides information on the usually neglected topic of book collections by, for or about **women.** The book also contains a detailed grant proposal for a regional women's library as well as a list of existing women's collections by state. Written by Maryann Turner and illustrated by Ellen Turner, the book is $5 from Celebrating Women Productions, Box 251, Warrensburg, N.Y. 12885.

"Three-in-One" signs that include (1) Braille letters, (2) tactile—raised—letters for non-Braille readers and (3) contrasting letters and background are of special assistance to **sight-impaired readers.** They are available from Seton Name Plate, which also supplies symbols of access and other related materials. Write the company at 968 Boulevard, New Haven, Conn. 06506.

Administrations: Making Programs Work for Children and Their Families is a compilation of articles from recent issues of *Young Children* dealing with determining goals and objectives, **management** principles, choosing and working with staff, working with family problems and evaluation. The 243-page paperback is $5.50 from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1834 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.



Dear CIBC:

I wanted to let you know my reactions to "School Textbooks: A Social Responsibility" [Vol. 10, No. 6]. When a First Amendment quasi-absolutist as myself finds your arguments reasoned and reasonable, you know you have done a fine job.

I was most impressed with the article and am very pleased it was in *Publishers Weekly*. We spend too much time "preaching to the converted" and I am pleased to see articles like this in the mainstream.

As usual—Hooray for the Council.

Patricia B. Campbell
Director of Grants, Research, and Academic Development
William Paterson College
Wayne, N.J.

Dear CIBC:

The article's inclusion [in "School Textbooks: A Social Responsibility," Vol. 10, No. 6] of the struggle against racism and sexism in books for children within the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment of our Constitution seems to me to be a creative and not unexpected extension of the Council's consistent work in raising the consciousness of all of us who are concerned with children's reading and the pictures it presents of various kinds of individuals in our pluralistic society. For me, as librarian, teacher, grandmother, the key word is awareness. I well remember a discussion with my staff, when I was head of children's services in a county library. At that time, we emphasized the important role of the Council's work and publications in helping us to develop our own sensitivity and to examine our own attitudes. I won't say that we always agreed with the Council's conclusions, but the point is that we had to *think*, and that was invaluable.

Betty Bacon
Berkeley, Cal.

Dear CIBC:

Because I am neither Ute, nor, even, a person of full blood, it would be presumptuous of me to disagree with Donna Lovell's fine review of *War Cry on a Prayer Feather*. There are certain things about the book, however, that trouble me, so that I end up having rather mixed feelings about it.

I question the ability of *any* white person to "interpret the basic Ute idea toward himself, his land, and his destiny," or to do it for any other Nation, either—not the good will, just the ability. Ms. Wood's poems and whatever are her own, and express her own personal appreciation of a way of life, but, for me, there is "nothing Indian about any of them" (her own words, describing the "dusty reservations" on which the Ute People live). Although she decries the need of the "American Public" to have Native people be "wise and noble savages," again for me, her book hovers perilously close to that same nostalgia on the part of "Indian lovers" for a way of life totally apart from theirs, that they have never really understood, and that their forbears helped to destroy. A certain reluctance on Ms. Wood's part to deal with the modern living, trying-to-make-it-any-ways/he-can Native person, comes across to me in little ways: the Utes "want to carve out a place for themselves," but they are "without motivation to do so"; "Because of these few [who hold to the old ways] the Utes will probably survive at least until Western civilization wipes them out entirely"; the caption for the photograph on page 77, which reads, "Julian Buck and 'Squaw.'" These *are* little things maybe, but, for me, nothing else that is in the book quite takes away the bad feeling they leave. We probably are going to buy the book, because of Donna Lovell's review, and for the pictures—How beautiful they are, the faces of my people—but it bothers me. . . .

Doris M. Seale
Supervisor, Services to Children
Public Library of Brookline
Brookline, Mass.

Dear CIBC:

I commend Arlene Hirschfelder and Jane Califf for helping teachers to present a true account of Thanksgiving from the Native American point of view ["Celebration or Mourning? It's All in the Point of View," Vol. 10, No. 6]. It is a story that has taken too long to tell.

My concern is that it is still a one-sided story. All children—Black, Asian, Native American, white—all need to be proud of their heritage! There are events in the past of all peoples for which they can feel shame and there are things for which they can feel pride. Must white children feel only shame on Thanksgiving Day to make the story of the Wampanoags effective? Would the cruelty and insensitivity shown to the Native Americans by the settlers be any less if some positive things were said about the Pilgrims and the reasons for which they felt thanksgiving after one year in a land that was strange to them?

For the sake of our children, let us come as close to the truth as we can when we write history, but let us not be so selective in what we include in our history that we do a disservice to one group in order to correct a disservice done in the past to another group. There were some positive aspects of the Pilgrim's experience that could have been included in your lesson plans that would not have taken away from the depiction of the plight of the Wampanoags. We should stop stereotyping Native Americans, but it can be done without substituting another stereotype, one of all settlers as being cruel and rapacious.

Betty Showers, Librarian
Beloit-Turner School District
Beloit, Wisc.

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CIBC is a non-profit organization founded by writers, librarians, teachers and parents in 1966. It promotes anti-racist and anti-sexist children's literature and teaching materials in the following ways: 1) by publishing the *Bulletin*, which regularly analyzes children's books and other learning materials for human and anti-human messages; 2) by operating the Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, which publishes reference books, monographs, lesson plans and audio-visual material designed to develop pluralism in schools and in society; 3) by conducting workshops on racism and sexism for librarians, teachers and parents; and 4) by initiating programs that bring to public attention the unrecognized talents of Third World writers and artists. For more information about CIBC and a free catalog of its Resource Center publications, write us at 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.