



# SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM USING SIGNING TIME®



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## USING SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Using American Sign Language (ASL) in your preschool or elementary school classroom will keep your students' hands moving, their minds engaged and their brains learning! In this Guide, you'll learn how this powerful tool can help you:

- engage students in learning
- improve academic outcomes
- create a more harmonious classroom

Let's start by considering some of the exciting findings that researchers have discovered about using ASL with hearing children in the classroom. Next, we'll recommend some quick and easy signing activities you can use every day to make language arts instruction more fun. Finally, for those of you who want to do even more to bring the powerful benefits of signing to your classroom, you'll learn about how the Signing Time Classroom Edition provides a wealth of additional resources to help you reach your goals.

## WHY USE SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM?

**Signing helps students become more engaged in learning.** Signing involves physical movement, which adds a kinesthetic element to learning. This physical movement engages students' bodies as well as their brains, giving them a more intensive and multi-sensory learning experience. In addition, some signs are iconic (they look like what they represent. For example, the sign for BIRD looks like a bird's beak opening and closing), which means that the form or action of the sign supports and strengthens understanding of the corresponding word. All of this physical involvement in learning pays off. Studies show that when words are presented orally, visually, and kinesthetically (through sign language),

students' scores on vocabulary tests are significantly higher than their non-signing peers.<sup>1</sup>

**Signing boosts academic achievement.** Multiple studies have been conducted with

hearing children who use sign language in their educational settings. Dr. Marilyn Daniels, an expert in this area of study, summarizes these research findings in her book *Dancing with Words*. Daniels reports





that signing in the classroom:

- increases test scores
- increases vocabulary acquisition rates
- helps students focus, concentrate and remember content

In addition, Daniels says that research findings point to social benefits of signing in the classroom. Signing:

- can create a more harmonious learning environment
- generates enthusiasm for learning among students
- increases self-confidence and self-esteem

These important social benefits contribute significantly to optimizing academic achievement.

**Signing boosts brain development.** Studies have shown

that the majority of the brain is devoted to visual processing. Marilyn Daniels continues: “Sign language instruction, with its requisite visual component, creates an increase in brain activity by engaging the visual cortex and presenting an additional language to the young learner.... Using sign language and English in tandem provides a much richer language base for brain activity and brain growth and development.”<sup>2</sup>

“Viewing, processing, and producing sign language results in an active learning situation that triggers accompanying eye movement. The more the eyes move, the more the muscles of both eyes will work together. This action provokes brain growth... the result... enables the student to focus, track, and concentrate when reading.”<sup>3</sup>

**Signing is a powerful tool for behavior management in the classroom.**

Signing requires eye contact, which automatically helps draw students’ attention to the teacher. When teachers use signs to cue transitions and new activities, students will be prepared to look and listen for new directions. Signing with students while they line up helps them stay actively engaged — and quiet — as they move through the hallways. Also, signing is an effective tool for helping younger students calm down. Signs require large, slow movements or repetitive, melodic actions, which have a natural flow and calming effect on children. Teachers who sign in their classrooms report that signing helps create a more harmonious environment because students are not only more tuned in to what the *teacher* is doing, they pay more attention to *each other* as well.

**Signing introduces students to the language and culture of the Deaf.**

When students are taught signs in the classroom, they are building a foundation for learning ASL – the third most used language in the United States today – as a second language. Using ASL in the classroom gives students a natural opportunity to learn about Deaf culture, and gives them the opportunity to communicate with deaf people they may encounter in life.





## SIGNING IN THE CLASSROOM

It's easy to integrate sign language into your classroom, home schooling program, or childcare setting. Here are some tips for signing with children of all ages:

- Keep your hands empty when signing, whenever possible
- Make eye contact with your students while signing
- Use facial expressions to convey feeling and/or intensity
- Use signs during daily routines (transition times, lunch, etc.)
- Keep signing activities fun to create a positive learning environment
- Use the *Signing Time Volume 13: Welcome to School DVD* to start each new school year

***Below you will find suggestions for activities and resources that will help you incorporate signing into the key areas of language arts instruction:***

### Reading

Teachers and parents are encouraged to read aloud to children for 15-20 minutes per day. Using sign language during oral reading will help students create clearer mental pictures of the stories they hear, which increases comprehension and makes the reading experience more meaningful. Here are some simple steps to take to incorporate signing into your daily oral reading:

- Teach students a few signs for key words in the selected reading.
- Ask students to sign those key words when you read them aloud.
- Ask questions about the story as you read and encourage signing in responses when appropriate. (e.g., "What did the

DOG do? That's right! The DOG went up in the BALLOON!")

- Encourage students to sign when they read independently or in small groups.

### Alphabet

The manual alphabet provides a kinesthetic, visual, and tactile way to learn and remember letter names and sounds. Here's how you can teach the letter C, for example:

- Write the letter C on the board so that it roughly matches the size of your hand when you form the C hand shape.
- Place your hand over the letter and make the sign for the letter C.
- Have students write the letter C on paper and make the letter C sign with their own hands.
- Next, pair a word and sign with the

letter to help students remember the sound. Write the word CAT on the board, say, "Cat starts with the /k/ sound. Make the sign for CAT, and fingerspell C-A-T.

- Make flashcards with the word CAT for each student to provide them with a portable visual key word chart as they learn. (The Classroom Edition provides a reproducible







flashcard for CAT and several other words to assist you.)

### Spelling

One way to add some fun to spelling is to teach students to fingerspell with the manual alphabet. Use fingerspelling in addition to writing the words with pencil and paper. Fingerspelling is beneficial because it:

- develops fine motor skills needed for writing.
- makes spelling easier to remember.
- engages the brain in a way that makes it easier to hear, understand, use and read spelling words when students encounter them in different contexts.
- helps students who learn best through movement and touch (kinesthetic learners).

### Vocabulary

Help your students develop an interest in the world and in learning new words by connecting ASL signs to your student's prior knowledge and life experiences. Once they learn new words, have them teach the signs to family and friends. Purchase an American Sign Language dictionary to use as a resource in your classroom. Teach your students how to look up words they want to learn. (Don't get discouraged if your signing vocabulary isn't as proficient as you would like. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn along with your students.)

### Recommended resources to encourage reading:

#### Story Time DVD

Includes six original stories that feature signs for family members, activities, animals, bugs, vehicles, feelings, colors, fruits, and more. Children learn key ASL signs before each story and see the words on the screen during the reading.

#### Signing Time Board Books

Volumes 1-6 provide children with a written description and visual demonstration of each sign, plus playful illustrations. These books can be used alone or to reinforce the signs in the corresponding DVDs.

### Recommended resources for teaching the alphabet:

- Signing Time Vol. 5 ABC Signs DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 5 ABC Signs Flash Cards
- Practice Time ABCs DVD
- ABCs and 123s Wall Posters

### Recommended resources for teaching spelling:

- Practice Time ABCs DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 5 ABC Signs DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 5 ABC Signs Flash Cards
- ABCs and 123s Wall Posters

### Recommended resources for teaching vocabulary:

#### Signing Time Music CDs

Great for learning new signs and reinforcing the signs they know - all songs have sing-along tracks that your students can perform along with.

#### The Sing and Sign DVD

Features 13 of the most popular Signing Time songs students can learn and later perform for parents and other classrooms.

#### Story Time DVD

Story Time brings books to life with full-screen illustrations and music. Learn how to sign key words from each story in ASL so you can read and sign along with Rachel. Features six original stories.



## OVERVIEW OF THE SIGNING TIME CLASSROOM EDITION

For teachers and parents who want a complete set of Signing Time resources to fully integrate signing into their curriculum, we've created the *Signing Time Classroom Edition*, which includes:

**16 themed learning units** full of fun and easy-to-do activities: At School, In My Classroom, Colors, Feelings, The Alphabet, Numbers, Getting Along, Family, Outside, Seasons, Eat and Drink, Fruits and Vegetables, Days of the Week, Pets, Farm Animals, and Zoo Animals.

**DVD segments** edited to correspond to the themes of each unit.

**Music CD with songs** from the DVD segments that relate to the unit themes. (Includes the sing-along versions for performance or practice.)

**Ready-to-copy handouts, flashcards, lyric sheets, and more**

**Background information** on Deaf culture, signing with children with special needs, classroom management and tips for effective teaching.

*If you are new to signing, don't worry. The Classroom Edition is written in a clear and concise way and is full of illustrations and multi-media resources to help you get started. All you need is a desire to learn and a few minutes a day to bring the powerful benefits of signing to your students.*



## GUIDED TOUR OF THE CLASSROOM EDITION

### Section 1: Lesson Overview

Designed for making lesson planning a snap, this page includes a list of signs, a list of the audiovisual materials you will need, and a summary of the lesson contents.

### Section 2: Teacher Tips

Get useful tips about classroom management, assessing comprehension and quieting down students, signing with music, fingerspelling, and more.

### Section 3: Sign Reference Guide

This is a signing “cheat” sheet for teachers to support you in learning new signs. Includes clear photographs of each sign

along with concise descriptions of how each sign is made.

### Section 4: Introducing Signs

This section includes several activities for you to choose from that will capture students' attention, introduce the topic, and teach the signs in the lesson.

### Section 5: Games & Activities

Includes games and learning activities for different ages and grade levels that help students practice the new signs they learned.

### Section 6: Poems and Songs

Adding music and poems to the educational life of any student brightens their mood and helps



them remember new signs. Using these songs, you can create an assembly/stage program for your class to sing and sign with the entire school and their families.

### **Section 7: CD and DVD Lyrics**

This section includes lyric sheets to keep handy during your lessons and copy and share with your students or their families. Lyric sheets can also be printed in large format to create lyric posters for your classroom.

### **Section 8: Book List**

We've included a list of books that you can find at your local library or bookstore that support the lesson topic so you

can easily plan for extension activities involving independent or group reading.

### **Section 9: Flash cards**

These ready-to-copy cards show the sign on one side and the printed word with an illustration on the reverse side. These cards can be used in the classroom setting for review, flashcard games, and independent study. For example: In the Pets, Farm Animals, and Zoo Animals units, have students cut out pictures from magazines of animals that match the animals they are learning on their flash cards. This activity is especially useful before going on a field trip to the zoo or farm.

### **Section 10: Certificate**

What a great way to reward learning! These printable certificates can be color-coded to allow students to keep track of their progress throughout the school year.



## **FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS** *at SigningTime.com*

### **Free Samples from the Classroom Edition**

Please visit <http://www.signingtime.com/classroom-edition/> to download free samples from the Signing Time Classroom Edition including Outline, Teacher Tips, Introducing Signs, Games and Activities, and Flashcards. You will also find a brief video introducing the Signing Time Classroom Edition on this page.

### **Enhance Literacy Instruction Using Signing Time**

Visit <http://www.signingtime.com/early-literacy> to download this free 10-page guide. Studies have shown that literacy skills are improved when American Sign Language is used in the classroom and home.



## WHAT IS SIGNING TIME?

Signing Time is a family of products (DVDs, Music CDs, books, and flashcards) that teach American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary. Signing Time products are created for children from infancy through age 8, but appeal to all ages and abilities. Signing Time DVDs feature children and adults who model each sign, original music, real-life scenes, and animated segments. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic teaching results in an effective, multi-sensory approach to learning. Each DVD in Series 1 teaches approximately 25-30 signs.

At the time of this publication, there are 34 DVDs available for purchase. The co-creator and host of Signing Time is Rachel Coleman, who is a mother to two girls: Leah, who is deaf, and Lucy, who has cerebral palsy and spina bifida. Rachel and her husband Aaron began signing with Leah when she was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at 14 months old.

Prior to learning that Leah was deaf, Rachel was a singer and songwriter. She has personally written all the songs in the Signing Time series and her fascinating life story has been featured in numerous national publications and media programs, including NBC's TODAY show.

Signing Time appeared on public television stations from 2006-2009, for which Rachel received an Emmy® nomination for the category entitled "Outstanding Performer in a Children's Series." Coleman co-created the series with her sister, Emilie Brown, who is the mother of two boys, Alex, and Zachary. (Cousins Alex and Leah are both featured in Signing Time along with Rachel.)

As the host of Signing Time, Rachel teaches each sign and then uses the signs in an original song, featuring video clips of infants, toddlers, young children and parents who sign the targeted words in a real-life context. The added visual component of the printed vocabulary word, along with an illustration, increases retention and comprehension of the new word and its sign. Verbal vocabulary often increases as ASL vocabulary increases.



*The key mission of Signing Time is to make basic sign language simple and engaging, not only for the child, but for everyone in that child's life.*





## SUCCESS STORIES

### **Signing with 'Class': Incorporating Sign Language Into the Classroom Improves Communication**

When I first learned about Signing Time, I thought about all of the wonderful things I could teach my triplet boys. They were born at 27 weeks and were facing many delays. Once my boys started signing and communicating more and more, I realized that my 3rd grade students at Kesterson Elementary School could also benefit from learning sign language.

At our fall open house, I explained to the parents that I would be introducing sign language to their children. I was overwhelmed with the positive response I was given that night. I explained that I would introduce signs that went along with our curriculum, a little at a time, and gave examples of how using sign language during structured teaching helped keep interruptions at a minimal level. For example, instead of interrupting a lesson, a student could sign when they need to use the restroom.

Around this time I also decided to start an after school sign language club, "Signing with Class." I wrote a grant proposal to the Junior League of Las Vegas, asking for \$1000 to pur-

chase Signing Time materials. A few weeks later I received a letter telling me that my proposal would be fully funded. I sent a letter out to students in grades 1-5, with the hopes that I would have at least 25 students interested. I was completely overwhelmed when I received 133 positive responses.

***"I can think of few other languages that have touched such a wide spectrum of individuals as sign language."***

Catherine Y., Henderson, NV

I did not want to turn away any students, so I split the group into two and attempted to see if I could successfully teach that many students at one time. The students were excited to learn sign language, and their enthusiasm was quite obvious. Each week I focused on one of the DVDs. During our class we spend the first half hour watching the DVD while I sign along with it. Afterwards the students have a chance to practice what they learned. We review the signs in a whole group setting,

and then split up into smaller groups. The students take turns signing and while the other students identify each sign.

Throughout the year, students use the Signing Time board books and flash cards as additional reinforcement. The students say it is very helpful to have the word, a picture of the sign and a description of how to do the sign on each page. I also provided each student with a list of the signs taught from the first series (I found this valuable tool on the Signing Time website). The students use these checklists to help them remember the signs they have been taught. Once they have mastered a sign, they check it off. If they have difficulty remembering the sign, they know they can ask to see the sign again.

It is so rewarding to see the enthusiasm the students have for sign language. I love hearing all of their stories they have each week. My favorite story came from a parent that told me that she was visiting the library with her first-grade daughter and met a deaf woman. My student was able to carry on a conversation with this adult with little difficulty. Her mom was absolutely amazed and hearing the story made my heart melt.

Since incorporating the use of sign language and additional



sign language instruction into the classroom I have continued to see improvement in communication between student and teacher. The benefits have also extended to parent-teacher and student-parent relationships as well. As a teacher, my goal is to build skills that will help my students grow into successful adults with the ability to communicate on many levels with those in the world around them. I can think of few other languages that have touched such a wide spectrum of individuals as sign language. I know that for my part it has reached those dearest to my heart and sharing this gift with my students has been both an honor and a joy.

*Catherine Y., 3rd Grade Teacher  
Henderson, NV*

**Many Classroom Uses for Signing Time** I am both a mother and a teacher. I love using Signing Time in my home and my classroom.

I have found so many uses for Signing Time in my classroom. Volume 13: Welcome To School is a great classroom-management tool. I use this DVD at the beginning of the year. As a teacher, I use many silent cues to communicate with my students so as not to disrupt the classroom atmosphere. These signs help me to communicate

***“I love finding ways  
to make learning  
fun & memorable.  
Signing Time  
is a great way  
to create  
those moments”***

*Anya G., Kearns, UT*

directions without ever using my voice.

Part of the first grade curriculum deals with teaching about a child's community. Volume 11: My Neighborhood is a great way to help students identify all those things that make up their community.

In first grade, we teach about animals and their habitats. I use Volumes 7, 8, and 9 to reinforce these concepts. They are able to see the animals as well as see some of the animals in their natural habitats. I use Volume 9: The Zoo Train before and after we go on our field trip

to the zoo. I have the students identify which animals they see at our zoo.

Another fun way to use Signing Time is through the CDs. Once the students learn the signs I use the CDs during music time. The students love to sing, and the signs create a way for them to be able to add movement.

I love using Signing Time in my classroom. I am not only able to review many concepts but they are a great reward. My students look forward to when they are able to watch Signing Time. I love finding ways to make learning fun and memorable. Signing Time is a great way to create those moments.

*Anya G., Kearns, Utah*





### Home-Schooling with Signing Time

I just want to share with you how Signing Time has been such an amazing gift in my family. We started to use it as part of our home-school second language curriculum for our four-year old daughter, Sabrina, who has an incredibly huge signing vocabulary. We usually watch Signing Time and then set out to apply those vocabulary words into the “real world.” We use home-made flashcards to reinforce the signs shown on the DVD and play games of “I Spy” using sign language. My daughter practices writing the words from the DVDs as well, so that she can start recognizing them in print. She also practices fingerspelling each word. We sign everywhere.

It seems there is always an opportunity to learn and reinforce the words and signs while we take our field trips. When we go to the grocery store I will sign what is on my list to my daughter and she will go find the item. When we go to the zoo or aquarium, we do the same thing. We both practice signing the animal we see, as well as characteristics describing that animal. We also use ASL when we practice math or when we practice counting, including everything that is added or subtracted (whether on paper or physical objects). Sabrina has done so well that she can count orally and sign up to the number 30. Another thing we

do is incorporate a “voices off” time in the house that allows her to practice and apply the sign language she has learned.

Sabrina has a quest for constant knowledge and asks for signs that aren’t shown on the videos on a daily basis. We are so grateful to Two Little Hands Productions for all the excellent Signing Time products and how much they have benefited our family. Thank you!

*Bridget E., Elkton, MD*



#### Classroom Edition

[SigningTime.com/classroom-edition](http://SigningTime.com/classroom-edition)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Robin L. Williams, MA** holds a Masters Degree in Teaching with a Reading Specialization from National University, and has a Clear Multiple Subject California Teaching Credential. After interpreting in Utah for a year, she taught in public elementary schools for eight

years. She has been using American Sign Language for the past 13 years after studying ASL at Brigham Young University and earning her Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education. Robin is a Thinking Maps Trainer of Trainers, and is a UCI Fellow with the Writing Project. Robin is a Master Signing Time Instructor certified through the Signing Time Academy and co-author of the guide “Enhancing Literacy Instruction Using Signing Time.” She currently is a stay-at-home mom with an infant and toddler who love to sign.

**Jim MacCall, BS** is a first grade teacher in the Lower Merion School District, outside of Philadelphia, PA. Jim has been teaching for 37 years in first grade. Jim holds a BS of Education from West Chester University and a Master of Education from Temple University. Jim is a Master Signing Time Instructor certified through the Signing Time Academy. Jim has been using sign language for three years with his first grade class. This past school year, Jim instructed all children in the first grade (80 students) in sign language.

<sup>1</sup> Daniels, Marilyn, *Dancing with Words: Signing for Hearing Children's Literacy*. Bergin & Garvey, Westport, CT, 2001. p. 33

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 122

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 125